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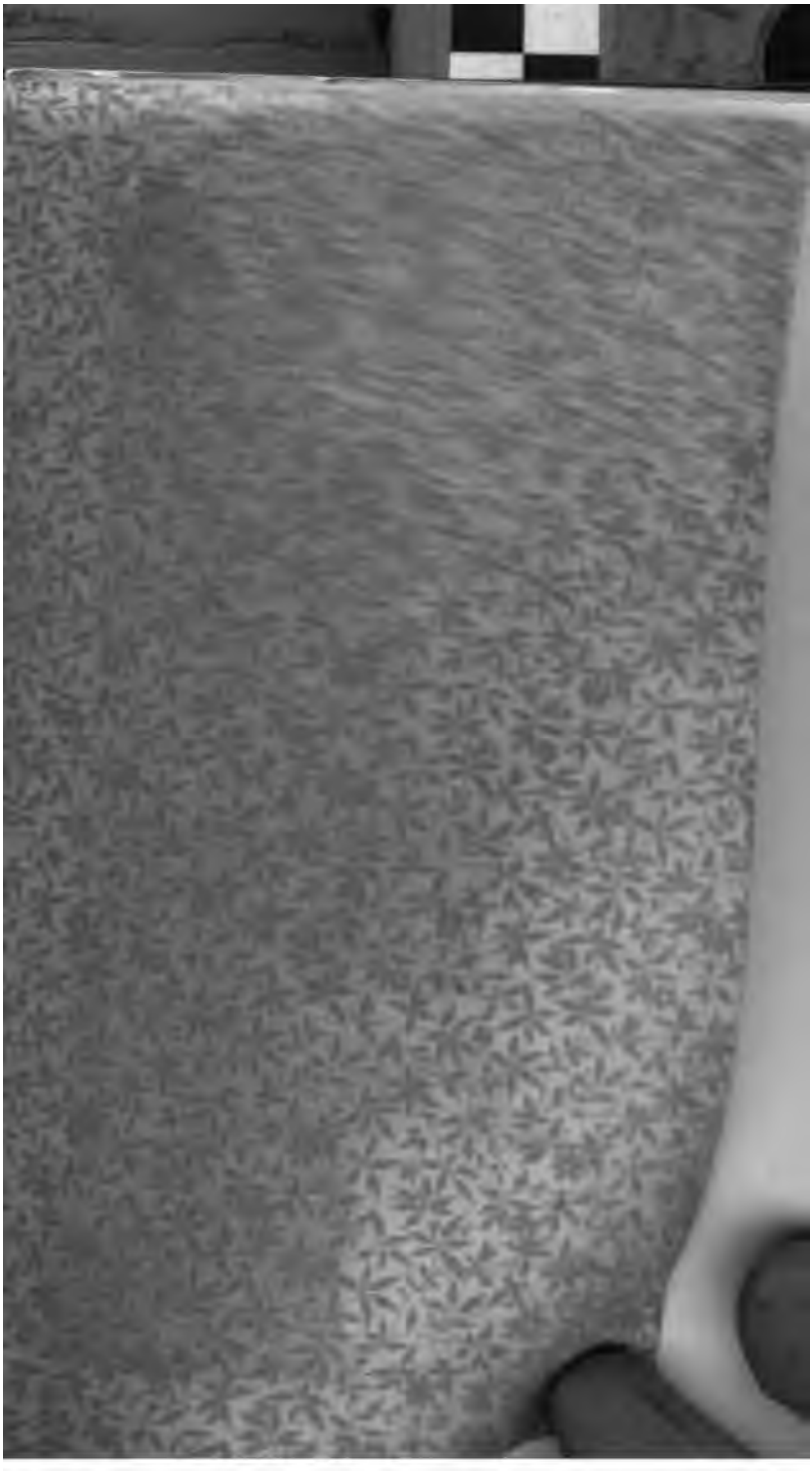

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best wishes

"CHERRY RIPE!"

May 94

A Romance

BY

HELEN MATHERS

Author of "Jock o' Hazelgreen," "Found Out," "The Story of a Sin," "Eyre's Acquittal," "My Lady Green Sleeves," &c., &c.

"Could ye come back to me, Douglas, Douglas,
In the old likeness that I knew
I could be so loving, so tender and true,
Douglas, Douglas, tender and true"

FIFTH EDITION

LONDON

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1895

"CHERRY RIPE!"

BOOK I.

BLOSSOM.

CHAPTER I.

> "Just so may love, although 'tis understood
> The mere commingling of passionate breath,
> Produce more than our searching witnesseth."

"RUN!" said Mignon.

"This way!" cried Lu-Lu.

Fate, using the insignificant fact of two school-girls running away from their governess, to alter the current of four persons' lives, directed the girls' steps to the left, and sent them spinning round one of the big trees of the avenue with such velocity, that a gentleman, who was advancing slowly from the opposite direction, found himself deprived all at once of breath, hat, stick, and patience.

"Upon my word!" said he angrily, and for the moment too much astonished at the hearty and simultaneous onslaught to be sure of the sex of his assailants.

"I beg your pardon!" said Lu-Lu.

Glancing sharply at the apple-cheeked, black-eyed school-girl, the young man did not discover in her face any reason why he should set aside the bad temper and *ennui* that devoured him, to assure her of his gratitude for the favour just accorded.

"We are very sorry!" said Mignon; and then he turned suddenly, and received an instant impression that here at least was something by no means to be included in the bitter weary disgust for the world, that this day filled his soul to overflowing.

> "And soon his eyes had drunk her beauty up
> Leaving no drop in the bewildering cup,
> And still the cup was full. . ."

In that moment was the wheel of his life's fate set moving, and also that of the girl who stood facing him beneath the pink and white blossoms of the flowering chestnuts, with something of the wonder of the young May morning in her innocent, childish eyes.

"We are very sorry," she said again gently, thinking how vexed he seemed to be about no great matter, and not daring to smile, lest she should make him yet more angry.

He almost laughed as it occurred to him that it was a pity none of his friends were by to see the ridiculous figure he cut before this pair of school-girls. The gay words that would at any other time have sprung to his lips, where were they now? and what magic was this that stole the wit from his brain, the words from his tongue, and deprived him of

the power to do aught save stand looking at the girl before him?

The matter was cut short by an act on the part of the culprits that proved them to be no fine ladies with correct notions of their own importance, for Mignon fetched his hat, Lu-Lu picked up his stick; and, having placed his property in his hands, they dropped him the simplest, sweetest, prettiest curtseys in the world, moved quickly away, and vanished.

Their disappearance broke the spell; he put on his hat and followed them.

That the girls were bent on mischief of some kind was pretty clear, seeing how they tacked this way and that, avoiding the open, and casting so many glances to the right and left, as could not fail, he thought, to reveal him sooner or later to their eyes. Only it so happened that they were not thinking of him just then, nor of anything except getting away by themselves to enjoy the full freshness and glory of this peerless spring morning, to revel in the rosy feast of blossoms that hung overhead, as they could not enjoy them under the guardianship of their governess, and in the company of the noisy pupils under her charge. They did indeed enjoy a hearty laugh at his expense so soon as they were safely out of earshot, and when, later, they perceived him close at hand, they looked at one another with a certain air that betokened the existence of a latent understanding between them; but they were guiltless of giggling or any other kind of affectation, as he was careful to note, being a man of fastidious taste.

Afterwards, when he tried to remember how he passed that day, he was not able: save that he was sure he had sat under the trees for a long while; that he had looked at many pictures, and heard many criticisms passed on them by a pair of merciless young judges, one of whom in her bloom and brightness eclipsed whatever she regarded; that he had gone on a wild-goose chase in and out, and round and about the Maze, following a little pair of untiring feet; that he had fed a big white swan that came sailing proudly down the mimic lake with a little dusky cygnet perched high upon its wings.

He also had a distinct impression that three or four times he had been all but caught by a sallow-faced Frenchwoman, but had each time escaped .... and yet that could not have been himself, but the girl whose shadow he was that day, and whose name was Mignon. He was quite sure of that, for had he not heard her so called by Lu-Lu many times? also that she lived at Rosemary, Lilytown, for which place had he not five minutes ago seen her set out, seated in a great open van drawn by two stout cart-horses? From the stolid Jehu, who was a curiosity indeed to be found within ten miles of London, he had by golden means, and quite unobserved, as he thought, extracted information concerning her place of abode.

Nor could he remember, in the days that came afterwards, at what time she went away; he only knew that it was daylight, and that the sky was still blue overhead, when he turned back, and threw himself down under one of the giant trees of the avenue, to think. About when he had first met her he was

more certain: it was quite early, ten o'clock perhaps; this he knew, because all his life long he should never see a young, exquisitely fresh May morning without the girl's face coming up before him.

Mignon . . . . that was her name, fanciful, tender, and un-English, yet one that became her well, he thought . . . . and then he fell to watching the rose and white leaves of the chestnut flowers fluttering slowly down; observing how the sun caught the inner side of one of the big prickly leaves, turning it to gold; how enchanting was the tiny patch of blue overhead . . . . and the snow and the red of the falling petals, the liquid gold of the sun-touched leaf, the bit of bright blue tapestry above, wove themselves unconsciously into a fairy likeness of a girl's face. . . . For were they not all there—the tints of her face, the colour of her hair, the very hue of her eyes? But the look that had caught and fixed his sight, and upon which his heart had closed, he found not in either blossom, or leaf, or sky, for it sprang direct from that purest of all sources, a maiden's innocent soul; and because his own life was just then so full of strife, and sin, and misery, this same look of hers outweighed in his eyes her mere beauty; for he had seen many fairer women. Mignon . . . . what fate did her name foretell, and what did her face say? Her future could be nothing to him, for his own lot in life was fixed, the stage was prepared, the last act but one in a reckless, unhappy, and guilty career about to be played out.

A bird alighted on a cluster of the blooms overhead, and as it swayed under his eager, slender feet, he poured out a

sweet gay song, his tribute of gratefulness for his happy life, his beautiful mate, his summer day of sunshine, and love, and plenty. The song of the bird, and the peace and beauty of the evening and the hour, stole into the man's heart, until he knew it not for that which had beat in his breast in the morning. Hither he had come in a mood of rebellion against all things in heaven and earth. With eyes turned inwards, he had passed all outward things by, nor observed any of the tender and manifold surprises of the morning, though, if any one had asked him, "What of the day?" he would have answered, "It is a fine May morning, and the chestnuts are in bloom;" but the heart of the man was dead to Nature's teaching, as it had been for long, ever since he had taken to reading and playing upon the vices, faults, and weaknesses of the men and women who came in his way.

Whence, then, came to him this clearness of the eyes, this subtle understanding of all that was fair and gracious, this capacity for drawing into the soul aught so evanescent, so impalpable, so delicate, as the quivering light on a leaf, the shifting colour of the sky, or the painting of a flower.

Thoughts unwonted and gentle came to him there . . . . of his dead mother; she had not been in his memory this half-dozen years or more . . . . recollections of his boyhood, and the eager bright days of his youth, when existence had seemed to him but a cup filled to the brim with sweetness, of which he could not drink too often, or too deeply . . . . to-night he found himself looking back upon that time without the scorn and pity with which in latter days he

was wont to regard that hopeful and not unworthy period of his life; nay, some of the old keen enjoyment of it returned to him as he lay still and mused, ... a new influence was upon him, gentle and humanising, to-night, and yet that which appeared to him as the touch of an angel's wing was in very truth a snare set for him by Satan.

When he had walked forth in the morning, his worldly callous heart full to the brim with bitterness and revolt, he had been a better man than now, when his recognition of beauty in goodness, and goodness in beauty, had its root in a half-conceived dishonour.

CHAPTER II.

"Clear summer has forth walked
Unto the clover sward, and she has talked
Full soothingly to every mated finch."

THERE floated over the wall so joyful and exquisite a peal of laughter, that a young man, who was walking in the garden on the other side, was seized with curiosity such as once set a King to pull up his slippers, and put on his spectacles, when he spied the unusual crowd collected in the royal pig-sty, on the occasion when his naughty princess kissed the swineherd.

Mr. Babbage informs us that "the air is one vast library, in whose pages are for ever written all that man said and woman whispered;" but he does not tell us what becomes of

the laughter so plentifully cast upon it day by day, and that surely has a character of its own, jocund, bitter, false, despairing, and is as much the language of the heart as words or tears; and yet, we could fancy that a peal of laughter such as that just uttered might sound musical after the lapse of ages.

It suggested all manner of sunshiny and humorous things — a witty jest, a ludicrous situation, a happy thought, any one of those absurdities that provoke toiling human nature to amusement, and are in themselves a species of luxury.

"I wonder what she is laughing at now?" said he who listened, smiling to himself for company. "I have a very good mind to find out," he added aloud (for there was nobody by, not even a blackbird, to hear him).

He paused in his walk, and looked upwards.

At the top of the wall, flourishing hardily and sweetly, was a tough little colony of wallflowers that had grown, the wind and the rain only knew how, and had come, the birds of the air only knew whence, affording, as he was well aware, a moderate screen, from behind which a discreet person might peep without much risk of being detected.

Hard by, against a peach tree, was a ladder, which he fetched, pitched it exactly opposite the wallflower, and proceeded to mount it with as bold a step, as though spying into a neighbour's garden were the most ordinary thing in the world, and no more reprehensible than overlooking an opponent's hand at whist, or reading a letter backwards, or any other of those dishonourable little actions by which we

deceive our friends, and open our eyes to our own delinquencies.

He could not, however, but feel it to be rather an awful moment when he topped the wall, and, pushing aside the scanty leaves and stalks of the wallflowers, gazed down into the garden twenty feet below.

The sight that met his eyes was curious but pretty, not particularly laughable in itself, yet tickling the beholder with a certain sense of pleasure that served all the purposes of laughter without demanding the outward expression of it.

Seated in her coach, with skirts tucked well up around her, and her neatly-shod feet full in view, sat a very young lady. Her coachman did not precede, but was behind her; horses she had none, and although she sat with a hand extended on either side and as majestic an air as though she were in the Lord Mayor's own coach on the ninth of November, Mignon's was no more and no less than a wheelbarrow. A white pocket-handkerchief was tied over her head, and the richest of red roses were blooming in her beautiful young cheeks as she came trundling past the peeper.

"Faster! faster!" she cried; "do you not know that Gretna Green is yet three miles away, and that I have a most particular appointment, with a most particular person, at half-past four precisely?"

For answer, there came a whir! whiff! and off flew the solitary wheel of Mignon's chariot, seating her with considerable emphasis on the exact centre of a parsley bed, which flourished greenly below the wallflowers.

"There!" she cried; and her voice was so young, and fresh, and gay, as to communicate to the listener a delightful sensation of novelty and enjoyment. It was

> "A sound as of a hidden brook
> In the leafy month of June,
> That to the sleeping woods all night
> Singeth a quiet tune."

"I always knew that would happen one of these days, and if I were a fine woman like you, Prue, it would have happened long ago!"

"Well, Miss Mignon," said Prue, sitting down on a three-legged stool, with her back to the wall, and drawing some needlework from her pocket, "I'm not so sorry neither, for in my 'pinion riding in a barrow ain't the suitablest thing for a young lady like you."

"Nevertheless," said the girl, regretfully, "I should never get half as much fun out of a coach and six as I've done out of that old piece of wood—not that I'm ever likely to possess a coach and one!"

"I'm none so sure of that," said Prue, nodding sagaciously. "Just you have a little patience, and you'll see what you will see."

"The days of Cinderella are over," said the girl, laughing and shaking her head; "and all the fairy princes are asleep or bewitched, though even if they were awake and about, they would not be likely to trouble themselves to look for a little insignificant school-girl like me! Why, except Bumble, and one other person, and you, I don't believe there's a soul who cares whether I'm dead or alive!"

"It do seem a cruel shame," said Prue, frowning; "if you was a foundling, so to speak, you couldn't be worse off than you are for friends and folks of your own."

"I have got her," said the girl gaily; "or at least I shall have her very soon, for at any hour—any minute she may walk in, and then what a time we will have of it—she and I, and you, together!"

Prue, compressing her lips tightly, shook her head, but made no remark.

"But until she comes," resumed Mignon, "there is no denying the fact that our existence here is—dull! Now I wonder if there is any bit of mischief about that a well brought up young woman could get into? If my gowns were smart enough—which they're not" (she spread out her skirt with both hands and regarded it ruefully), "we might go to the Park and look at all the fine people, but as it is, we have only Hampton Court and Madame Tussaud's to choose from, and I know both by heart!"

"Miss Sorel said we might go to the Poly—— something, where they improve folk——" began Prue.

"But I don't want to be improved," said the girl. "I want to be amused, and—and oh! Prue, will you ever forget the last time we went to Hampton Court?"

"Ah!" said Prue, grinning and looking disdainful. "If Miss Sorel had been at home, it never would have happened, but there, them furrineering mamselles don't know nothing!"

"Shall I ever get it out of my head?" cried the girl, breaking into sudden laughter.

"'Four and twenty blackbirds
Baked in a pie'

Only we were baked in a van! We must have looked fine when we drove from the door, every alternate girl visible through the open framework at the sides, bounding, jumping, jolting, creaking, bones rattling, lockets dancing, teeth chattering—was there ever such a shaking up upon earth? We were black and blue next day, Prue!"

"I'll tell Miss Sorel when she comes back," said Prue, with decision.

"Though, after all," said Mignon, "it was a charming day—but for one thing, and that was dreadful!"

"What was that, miss?" said Prue, looking up quickly.

"Miss Lu-Lu and I nearly knocked down a young man!" said Mignon. "If we had beaten him with sticks," she went on, looking thoughtfully at the two pretty feet placed in the first position before her, "he could not have looked more astonished."

"How did it happen, miss?" said Prue, regarding her mistress with covert but keen inquiry, and pausing in her work.

"We were running away from mademoiselle and the girls," said Mignon, "and, just as we spun round one of the big trees of the avenue, she one side, I the other, we came against a gentleman who was advancing, one on the right, the other on the left—for a moment I do believe he thought he saw double!"

"Did he speak, miss?" inquired Prue with interest.

"No, indeed," said Mignon, laughing, "that he did not!

Although we begged his pardon twice over, and even picked up the things we had knocked out of his hands, he never uttered one syllable! It occurred to us afterwards that perhaps the poor man was dumb!"

"Dumb?" repeated Prue in an accent of incredulity; "dumb did you say, miss? Ho! ho! ho! I beg your pardon, miss, but—Ho! ho! ho!"

Mignon looked in astonishment at the woman, who seemed to be struggling against a grotesque and secret merriment, that mastered her against her will.

"And pray," said the young lady with dignity, "is it such a very odd thing, that a man should be dumb? Hundreds of people are dumb."

"I dare say, miss," said Prue, recovering, "but somehow the notion tickled my fancy,"—here she showed symptoms of a relapse—"but can you mind what he was like, Miss Mignon?"

"Very dark—with very blue eyes, a combination that's too womanish, I think, for a man! And perhaps because we had been so rude to him," she went on, leaning her fair head against the wall, "he thought he would be rude to us, for he followed us about the whole day, and even came to see us set off in the van! and Miss Sorel always tells us that it is a very great insult for a gentleman with whom one is not acquainted, to stare at and walk behind one."

"So it is, miss," said Prue, "generally."

"And yet," said Mignon meditatively, "it is not considered a rude thing for a young man to fall in love with a person—quite the reverse! You see he must make a begin-

ow I wish something would happen—just to l
set us going—if somebody would only take
› write me a letter even, I think I could

:er?" said Prue, starting, "and who'd be ‹
you but Miss Lu-Lu, or Miss Sorel, dear he
ıeard from both of them last week."
is nobody else. She would not write, she w
ıt all the same I should love to have a letter f
don't care who—just to make me feel that I
terribly unimportant little person—that there
at least in the world to trouble her head ab

ıg in Prue's pocket suddenly burnt her, as
ıpendthrifts is historically supposed to do; ‹
ed at the wistful, lovely face, that made the s
ıappiness of her life, she cast all scruples to
, taking off her thimble and laying down
udden decision:

CHAPTER III.

"While every eve saw me my hair up-tying
With fingers cool as aspen leaves . . .
I was as vague as solitary dove,
Nor knew that nests were built."

"A HIM?" said Mignon, laughing gaily, "but I don't know a single one who is likely to do anything of the sort!"

"Hasn't it ever struck you, Miss Mignon, that maybe, one of these days you'd be picking up a sweetheart?"

"No," said Mignon, clasping her arms round her knees, and leaning her head so far back that the unseen listener got an excellent view of a pretty, straight nose, and some long brown eyelashes. "I can't say it ever has, Prue. It is not often that a schoolgirl arrives at the dignity of a real sweetheart! Though indeed," she added, sighing, "it must be charming, Prue. Tell me, did you ever have one all to your own self?"

"Maybe," said Prue, turning a handsome brick-dust colour, "but that was a long time ago, Miss Mignon."

"And were you in love with him?"

"No, miss, I never would be—for fear. Falling in love's a ticklish thing—very."

"Did he ever write to you?" inquired Mignon, surveying Prue with respect, and from a new point of view, "because if he did, and if you would not mind it very much, I should so like to read one of his letters! I never read a real love-letter in all my life, and for a particular reason that I can't

explain to you just now, I am so anxious to see what it's like."

Prue, looking anxiously at her young mistress, plaited and unplaited her apron with restless, clumsy fingers. A struggle was evidently taking place in her mind. . . . . She was but an ignorant, gentle-hearted woman, ardently desirous to act for the good of the creature she loved best upon earth, yet sufficiently conscious of her shortcomings to doubt the wisdom of her own decision.

"And what would you say, Miss Mignon," she said at last, "if I was to tell you that I've got a love-letter in my pocket at this very particular moment?"

"Say!" cried Mignon in delight, "why, that it would more than make up for the wheel coming off the barrow! And to think that you'd got it bottled up there all this time, and never said a single word about it! Why, if anybody wrote me a love-letter, I shouldn't be able to sit down for a week, much less do plain-sewing!"

"And supposing," said Prue, her hand in her pocket, "that somebody should take the trouble to write a love-letter, not to me, Miss Mignon, but to you?"

"That is so likely, is it not," said the girl, laughing, "when I do not know a single man who is not fat and bald, and a long way past forty? No, no, Prue, only young people write love-letters, and I do hope he is very deeply in love with you, because I don't want to read a cool love-letter, you know."

"He's just mad with love," said Prue, nodding, "but it's not with me, Miss Mignon, it's with you?"

"Me?"

"You!"

"Somebody in love with ME?"

"Somebody in love with you!"

"Not a school-boy, or the sexton, or the postman, or the chimney-sweep?" said Mignon, her eyes growing rounder and rounder as she looked at Prue.

"No, miss, a gentleman."

"Grown up? out of jackets?"

"La! yes, miss, in tails. Looks as if he'd been born in 'em."

"Prue," said Mignon, in a tone of disbelief, "are you joking? Are you making all this up because I said I thought I should like to have a sweetheart?"

"No, miss, it's gospel truth."

"What an extraordinary thing!" said Mignon, drawing a deep breath, "what an altogether outrageous thing—to fall in love with me, of all people in the world! And where on earth did he do it, and what could have inspired him with the gigantic idea?"

"It was at Hampton Court, miss," said Prue, "and so far as I can make out, it's the very gentleman as you and Miss Lu-Lu nearly upset in the avenue."

"I certainly made an impression upon him," said Mignon soberly, "and on his hat, and his shins, or I am very much mistaken. Are you quite sure, Prue, that he is not pretending, just to pay me out for being so rude to him?"

"No," said Prue, nodding impressively, "he's in earnest, there's no mistake about that."

"And indeed," said Mignon, "I am beginning to think he must be, to do anything so desperate as to write me a love-letter! Why, Lu-Lu never had one in all her life, and she is seventeen years old, and we should both have been so much obliged to any one who would write us one, just to see what it would be like!"

Prue, looking down on her needlework, smiled. Miss Sorel's school was a well-ordered one; the supervision of letters was strict.

"If only," said Mignon, emerging from her trance of amazement with a sigh of delight, "he had thought of it earlier, how it would have helped to pass the time, to be sure! Why, it would have been twice as amusing as Grimm's Goblins, and a thousand times better than the wheelbarrow!"

"P'r'aps I'm wrong in telling you about it at all," said Prue, "but Lor! he began to write to you long afore you thought of the barrow; you've only had that a week, but he've been writing love-letters to you for the last two."

"What!" cried Mignon, starting up; "he took the trouble to write to me, and you never even told me? Oh! I will never, never forgive you," she cried, stamping her foot; "and when you knew how dull I was too!"

And here Mignon began to cry, for she belonged to that class of women whose anger holds long enough to let them say all that they wish, and perhaps to bang a door or two, ere it dissolves in tears.

"La!" said Prue, "what a temper you've got, to be sure, Miss Mignon! I misdoubt me, but I've done wrong in

telling you of the letters, though if 'twasn't for a little circumstance as happened no later than last night, p'r'aps you'd never have knowed nothing of the matter at all."

"A circumstance!" cried Mignon, a flicker of April sunshine coming and going in her blue eyes; "and pray what was that?"

"Not much," said Prue. "Only when I told him I couldn't and wouldn't bring you no love-letters, since you was left in my charge while Miss Sorel was away, he just took me by the shoulders, and shook me with all his might and main till the breath was all but out of my body, and said he, 'I'll ask you to take her no more letters, you fool, but I'll just go straight to her myself.' When he'd done, I said to myself, 'That's real love and no mistake, and I don't know as it's my duty to stand between 'em.'"

"Did he really?" said Mignon, "he must be very fond of me to do that, Prue! It reminds me wonderfully of William the Conqueror and Matilda!"

Here she sat down on the parsley-bed, obeying the universal impulse of women to start up at the merest suspicion of good or bad news, and to sit down under the shock of the reality, whichever it may be.

"I don't know nothing about William and Matilda," said Prue. "But his way of doing things made me think he loved you true, and meant honest by you, and there's no denying I should be glad and thankful to see you settled in a home of your own, for more reasons nor one, and so——"

"But I don't want your reasons," cried Mignon, "I want the letter," and seizing Prue's pocket, she turned it inside

out. The last thing coming uppermost proved to be a big square envelope, decidedly the worse for wear, indorsed in a bold handwriting:

"Miss Mignon,
"Rosemary,
"Lilytown."

"There!" said Prue, surveying it, "I don't know whether it's one of the old ones; but I dare say it'll be just as good to read if it is—I guess he says pretty much the same in all of 'em!"

"I don't think I'll read it to-day," said Mignon, holding it a little way off, and looking at it admiringly. "It can't come twice in one's lifetime to open one's first love-letter, you know! I'll save it up as a great treat until to-morrow. What do people generally say in love-letters, Prue?"

"Rubbish!" said Prue, rolling up her work. "One don't look for sense from lovers, miss!"

CHAPTER IV.

"She hath one of my sonnets already; the clown bore it, the fool sent it, the lady hath it: sweet clown, sweeter fool, sweetest lady!"

Mignon sat on a wooden chair in the sunlight, hemming a pocket-handkerchief, at nine o'clock in the morning. She wore a white dimity gown, with ribbons at the waist, throat, and wrists, which matched the colour of her eyes exactly, and altogether she and the young June

morning became each other vastly, and seemed expressly made for one another. She was but an indifferent needlewoman, and took advantage of every possible pretext to pause in her work—quarrelling with a stray sunbeam that had fallen in love with her eyelashes; watching a butterfly fluttering past, making fun of an industrious bee who had got into the garden by mistake, and finding cabbages instead of flowers, went buzzing about in a discontented fashion. She said good-morning to an ancient snail who came slowly by, as though he found existence rather a troublesome affair than otherwise, and condoled with him concerning the law of nature that compelled him to carry his house on his back, at the same time pointing out that the scheme had its advantages, since he need never be at all afraid (like other folks) of his dwelling being pillaged, or burnt down while he was abroad. "And as for you, sir," she said to a Polly-wash-dish, who was wiggling his long tail up and down the gravel-walk at a safe distance from her, "if you had any shame in you at all, you would blush for your own deficiencies —are you aware that the linnet has sixty-four notes in his register, while you have not a single one worth mentioning? While as to washing up dishes, I don't believe you ever do anything half as useful, for it's my belief that you're a regular gadabout, disgraceful flirt, with a better opinion of yourself than anybody else has, your wife included—there! Still I think I would rather be a pert silly creature like you than sitting on a wooden chair hemming a handkerchief that has been in process of hemming three days, and may consider itself lucky if it's finished in three more!"

She set a few stitches as the bird took himself off, then laid down the handkerchief in her lap, and drew from her pocket a letter, at which she looked with immense complacency, holding it away from her with her head on one side, bringing it nearer to her by degrees, finally depositing it in her lap, and resuming the handkerchief with a deep sigh of satisfaction.

"It's the most extraordinary thing I ever heard in my life," she said, shaking her fair head. "It can't be my looks—Muriel is lovely, and I'm not a bit like her, no two sisters could be more unlike; and it can't be my money, for I have none; so it must be my own self that Mr. Rideout's fallen in love with. Ah! it's a finer thing to be loved for what you are than what you've got, because the looks and the money often run away from you, but you stay, unless you die, that is to say; and of course when you're dead you don't think of whether people like you or not! After all, it was a mercy I came round that tree; in all probability, he never would have seen me if I had not, and then the chance would have gone by, and perhaps I should never have had a lover all the days of my life (it's not likely two people would be so mad as to fall in love with me), but now —I'm somebody. 'When I got up this morning, I said to myself, 'Most likely Mr. Rideout's getting up too, and I shouldn't wonder if he's thinking about—me. He will go out and look for Prue by-and-by, to see if she has got a letter from—me. When he has read it, he will sit down (entirely and solely upon my account) to write to—me; and then he will go out with it again, and his head quite full of—me.

Only to think of it—a little person that nobody owns, and nobody loves, to be of so much importance all in a minute to another person as that!

"'Am I never to have a chance of speaking one word to you, Miss Mignon?' he says. 'Shall I never find means to elude the vigilance of that she-dragon, Mrs. Prue?'

"Though, indeed, that is not kind of him," she said, looking down at the open sheet, and smiling; "after he had shaken her into bringing me the letter too!

"'And if you will not hold your finger up to give me this same chance, I will force my way to your side and tell you—what will I not tell you, my lovely little sweetheart?'

"And he ends:

"'Your faithful lover,

"'PHILLIP RIDEOUT.'"

"It is very short," she said, laying it down and surveying it with regret, whereby it would appear that Mr. Rideout thoroughly understood the art of love-letter writing as expounded by the elder Mr. Weller, when he advised Sam to make his letter very sweet, but very short. "For then," said he, "she vill vish there vos more."

"If Prue does not come soon," said Mignon, "I shall be obliged to go down on my knees and tell Bumble all about

it, and though of course he would not understand, still he would be better than nothing!"

She fell to hemming again, though certain smiles and stray dimples occasionally relieved the gravity of her countenance. Presently, Prue appeared, bearing a work-box and a pile of calico.

"Oh, there you are at last!" cried Mignon, "but you may as well put that stuff away, for I'm not going to do any more needlework to-day. I'm going," she said gravely, "to do the most particular thing I ever did in all my life, and I want you to help me. Tell me, Prue, did you ever write a love-letter?"

"Once by whiles, miss. Why?"

"Never you mind. What did you say?"

"I can't recollect, miss, 'tis so long ago."

"But you can at least remember how you began it?" said Mignon anxiously; "the very first you ever wrote — you can't have forgotten that?"

"Yes, miss," said Prue gently, "I have forgotten even that."

But she had not: no woman ever does forget what she said in her first love-letter; and at that moment Prue's eyes saw not the work she held in her hands, but a round wooden table in a country-house kitchen, a sheet of gilt-edged pink paper, a knot of violets, and what was written upon the page I cannot tell, but am very sure that Prue could, word for word.

"You see," said Mignon, frowning and looking wise, "there is always a right and a wrong way of doing every-

thing, even to writing a love-letter, and it would be such a dreadful thing to take the wrong one, would it not?"

"Drefful," said Prue; "but you're not thinking of writing to Mr. Rideout this morning?"

"And why not?" said the girl. "Don't you know that it is the rudest thing possible not to send an answer to a letter that you have received?"

"I don't fancy that rule applies to love-letters, Miss Mignon," said Prue dubiously, "and writing's a very dangerous thing. It don't so much matter what you says, miss; words is easy forgot, unless they happen to be particularly true and stick; but what you write, why, there it is, and there you are—there's no getting out of it nohow."

"But," said Mignon, "I'm not going to say anything I mind anybody seeing! I only want to tell him that I'm very much obliged to him for his letter, and that I hope he will write me another one soon (for really there is very little in this one, and wouldn't fill half a page of our—but that's a secret), and ask him what on earth made him take a fancy to me, and send him my best love—and—and I think that's all, Prue!"

"All!" said Prue, aghast, "and about enough too, I should think! Miss Mignon, Miss Mignon, young ladies don't write like that the first time they put pen to paper to a young man; they hold back a bit, for it's a drefful mistake to be forrard with a man—there's such a deal of selfishness in 'em, that if there's any doubt of getting a thing they perticular want, they'll pursue it like mad till its overtook. But the difference there is when a man's sure of a girl, and when

there's a considerable doubt about it, so nimble and civil and wideawake when he's on his promotion, so easy and lazy when he's got her safe and sound!"

"Yes," said Mignon absently, for she had long ago lost the thread of Prue's argument, "but really it was very unlucky that Mr. Rideout did not put any beginning to his letter, for of course I could have put just the same to mine. I would not for the world be behind him in politeness, or offend him—perhaps he would never write to me again, and that would be dreadful!"

Prue threw up her hands in despair.

"Now what," said Mignon, "would you say to 'My dear Mr. Rideout'?"

"No 'my,'" said Prue. "'Dear Mr. Rideout.'"

"Keep that in your head while I get the things ready!" said Mignon, picking up her desk from the ground, and arranging it on her knee.

"Now then." "Dear Mr. Rideout," she wrote in good intelligible round-hand. On ordinary occasions she wrote a rather pretty scrawl, but on an occasion of such magnitude as this, she instinctively fell back upon the careful caligraphy of earlier years. "Now I should like," she said, "to tell him that I am sorry I ran up against him in that rude manner with Lu-Lu, or he may think I'm in the habit of doing such things. Don't you think it might be as well just to mention it, and start fair, Prue?"

"P'r'haps so," said Prue, considering; "though I should say that, on the whole, miss, it being such a very awkward little circumstance, the less said about it the better."

"First of all," wrote Mignon, "I must beg your pardon for nearly knocking you down that day in Bushey Park—I never did such a thing before in all my life, and I never will again, if I can possibly help it! I am very much obliged to you for the letter you sent me by Prue, and hope you will write me another one soon, as I am so dreadfully dull here, though, if it would not be a great trouble to you, would you mind making it a little *longer*?"

"And I should like," said Mignon, pausing in her labours, "to say something nice and complimentary about his appearance, for in his letter he called me—he actually did—'lovely!' Of course he did not mean it; still I don't wish him to have all the civility on his side, so can you think, Prue, of any safe, polite remark that one might make to a person with blue eyes and black hair, when one did not admire either the one or the other in a man?"

"No, miss, I can't. 'Tis a delicate matter, and you might say the wrong thing; you'd best let it alone."

"Oh, very well," said Mignon, looking disappointed, "but it does seem a regular pity to miss such a good opportunity! And if you would not mind telling me," she wrote, "I should like so much to know what made you take a fancy to me; nobody ever did before, or is ever likely to do so again! Was it because you thought I had nobody to care about me, and so you were sorry for me?"

"That'll never do, miss," said Prue hastily. "It's a bad notion for a man to have, that he can either take or leave you because there's nobody else as is fond of you."

"Never mind the notion," said Mignon, "is it not the

truth? And now for the finish, I declare its almost as bad as the beginning! He says, 'Your faithful lover;' now wouldn't you think, 'Yours very gratefully' would be the proper thing?"

"'Yours truly,' or nothing," said Prue, in horror, "that's the usual—the only respectable way of ending a love-letter, miss."

"I don't see at all why I should be such a long way behind him!" said Mignon discontentedly; "but as you've written some yourself, of course you ought to know all about it. 'With love,' then, 'yours truly!'"

"No love!" said Prue; "kind regards, miss!"

"Kind regards, then," said Mignon, sighing. "With kind regards, yours truly, Mignon Ferrers!"

But on her own account she put in as P.S.: "I wanted to send my love to you, but Prue, who helped me to write this letter, would not hear of it; indeed, she has been so troublesome, that I have a very great mind to write my next love-letter to you all by myself!"

CHAPTER V.

"I am one, my liege,
Whom the vile blows and buffets of the world
Have so incensed that I am reckless what
I do to spite the world."

It was nine o'clock in the evening, and the dusk was veiling the trees and houses of Lilytown delicately; the happy

summer day was dying, the shadowy, silent night was creeping slowly into life.

There brooded over the district that strange loneliness which at nightfall attends places which are neither town nor country, missing the cheerful sights and sounds of the former, and not possessing the careless freedom and security of the latter; and the roads, planted at intervals with trees, were so absolutely deserted that it might have been a city of the dead, instead of a surburb but a few miles from London.

Prue, her shopping over, and basket in hand, set out on her homeward walk in a leisurely fashion, taking now and again a long refreshing sniff of the pure, fresh air. She had not gone very far when footsteps, rapid and decided, came following after hers.

"Him!" she said, giving a little jerk of her head backwards, and quickening her steps.

"Ah! he's a bold one," she soliloquised, "a re'glar handful as ever I saw."

A tall man stepped from behind a tree, and intercepted her. He came so swiftly and silently, that she half shrieked, but being strong-nerved, turned the hysterical cry into, "I beg your pardon, sir!" and passed on.

It gave her an odd sensation of doubt and fear when, glancing downwards, she saw the man still by her side, keeping pace with her step for step, and treading so lightly that his footfall sounded strange and ghostly in the stillness.

"Mrs. Prue," said the man, "you will not give the letter you have in your pocket to Mr. Rideout, who is now following us."

Prue stopped as though she had been shot, for once in her life, momentarily incapable of speech; then recovering herself,

"And pray," she said, peering into his face through the gathering dusk, "who may you be, and what do you mean with your Mrs. Prues and letters?"

"A friend," said the man, "who would act a friend's part; but we must move on, we shall be overheard."

Involuntarily Prue walked on, compelled thereto, though unconsciously, by the strength of will of the man who addressed her.

"Mrs. Prue," he said quietly, "you have a little charge whom you love. She is left under your sole care, yet you have conveyed to her a letter written by a man whose name you do not know, whose character you are ignorant of, and, misled by you, and betrayed by you into a clandestine correspondence, she has replied to that letter. Her answer lies in your pocket at this very moment. In your own mind you have thought the matter out thus: Here is my young mistress without any relations, with next to no friends, she may at any moment, by the death of her benefactress, be thrown penniless upon the world, and here is a lover, young, rich, who is able to take her out of all this doubt and uncertainty, and, by making her his wife, secure to her a home, and a certainly provided for future. So far, your reasoning (setting aside the young lady's own inclination) is good, and there is but one drawback to your plan."

"And that is?" cried Prue, coming up, gasping, from the cold bath of amazement into which he had plunged her.

"That he is not at liberty to woo any woman honestly. Judge then what you are doing by promoting a correspondence between your innocent young mistress and this man, and remember that one encroachment paves the way for another—the next will be, his making his way into her presence."

"Good Lord!" said Prue, aloud; "now I wonder who's to know which is the honest man, and which is the rogue?"

"If I were a rogue," said the man by her side, "I should scarcely be taking this trouble to serve your mistress, should I?"

"Your voice sounds honest," she said at last, "but I can't see your face, or I should know in a minute if you're telling me the truth. Anyway I'll promise you this, he shan't have the letter till I've found out whether or no it's lies you've been telling me this night—there!"

Mr. Rideout, his patience exhausted, actuated moreover by suspicions he was resolved if possible to verify, here took half a dozen hasty steps forward, and joined the waiting-woman and her companion.

"Good-evening, Mrs. Prue!" said he; "I hope I don't intrude?"

Paul Pry's famous phrase fell from his lips in so rollicking, dare-devil a fashion that Prue, for all her fears, could not forbear smiling as she replied:

"No intrusion, sir; certainly not."

They were at the moment passing a gas-lamp newly lit, which plainly revealed the two men's faces to each other

and to Prue, and the eyes of the former met in a sudden keen scrutiny, that hardened instantaneously—on Rideout's part at least—from inquiry into hostility. From this moment they became enemies, with no one-sided enmity, as when one man hates another virulently, while the latter is too indifferent or peaceable by nature to return the compliment with vigour, but equally, with a thorough and hearty reciprocity.

"So," said Rideout to himself, "sets the wind in that quarter? I must hasten operations a little, or he will be cutting in before me, and heavily as I am handicapped by cursed ill-luck, no one but I shall win her—I swear it!"

Prue also had profited by the momentary opportunity afforded by the lamp, and had drawn a comparison between the two men, surely unjust, seeing that the colour of a man's hair, or the shape of his features, affords no clue to his qualities of heart, mind, and brain.

Quickening her steps, for she felt about as comfortable as may he who is planted between two barrels of gunpowder that may explode at any moment, Prue suddenly discovered that the man in grey had disappeared.

"Well, I'm sure!" ejaculated Prue, staring alternately at the sky, the earth, and the trees, as if she expected them to inform her which direction he had taken. "I wonder am I bewitched to-night, or dreaming?"

"Dreaming," said Mr. Rideout curtly, angry at what he believed to be her deceitfulness and double-dealing; "perhaps, however, you'll try and collect your wits sufficiently to

answer me a question or two. In the first place, who was that man that left you a moment ago?"

Left her! Had he then disappeared by so prosaic a fashion as leaving her? To Prue's excited imagination he was hovering somewhere near in an atmosphere of brimstone, for who but the Evil One himself could have told her the thoughts, plans, and hopes that she had nourished in her own breast, but never ever breathed to any living creature?

"Do you hear me, woman?" cried Mr. Rideout; "who was that man?"

"That, sir," said Prue, with unexpected spirit (why does the accusation of being a woman ever carry to the female mind an intolerable sense of unmerited insult?), "is my affair."

"No!" he cried, "I am pretty sure that it is mine. Doubtless you are a very good woman, but I'll be shot if you're a handsome one, and that man is no lover of yours, but of—your mistress."

"He?" cried Prue, in amazement, and reassured at the notion of the stranger being anything so commonplace as a lover. "Why, I never saw him in all my life until to-night!"

"And he did not ask you to convey any letter or message to her?" persisted Rideout, who judged his neighbour by himself.

"No indeed!" said Prue. "On the contrary——"

She stopped abruptly.

"On the contrary,"—he repeated.

With some men thought is naturally slow, with others in-

stantaneous, and to the latter class belonged Rideout. Moreover, guilt, that marvellous quickener of the intelligence, had greatly intensified his powers of observation, so that it was in the manner of an assertion, rather than a question, that he cried:

"So he knows something of me; he warned you against me, did he?"

Utterly unable to discover the connecting link between her own hasty disclaimer and his remark, which hit truth in the bull's eye, Prue felt more than ever convinced that the devil was abroad to-night; and like the friar, who, surprised in the midst of a savoury meal on a fast-day by a terrific thunderstorm, could not imagine why there should be such a fuss about a little bit of bacon, Prue felt it to be altogether beyond her philosophy that the innocent love-letter lying in her pocket should be the occasion of a general upheaval of things.

"Can't you speak?" he cried impatiently.

His imperious tone was one to which Prue was by no means accustomed, so that it was with a certain dignity that she replied:

"Them as has got nothing to fear has no call to trouble themselves about what folks says of them, sir; and I'm misdoubting me but I've done wrong in telling Miss Mignon, and I'll tell her no more—but, sir," her voice broke off suddenly; "how could you have the heart to try and deceive her so, and she so young, and lonely, and all?"

"Yes," he said, his voice altogether changing, "she is very young and very lonely. . . . A man would be hard-

hearted indeed who sought to harm such as she . . . . and you think me as bad as that?" he cried, turning suddenly round upon Prue.

In his voice, as in that of the man who had but now spoken with her, was a ring of honesty, that she, being so purely honest herself, could not fail to recognise and acknowledge. For a moment she hesitated; then, making up her mind more quickly than she had ever done in her life before:

"Sir," she said, "if you love my young mistress as she ought to be loved, and if you're still wishful to get her for your wife (as you told me the other night you was), then 'twill be no such great matter to wait for her till Miss Sorel comes back, when you'll be able to court her as ladies is used to be courted, not as if she was a poor serving-maid like me."

"I have seen your Miss Sorel," he said, "a cold, proud, handsome woman, who has outlived the memory of her youth; who would choose a girl's husband for her as she would buy her an instructive book or a useful gown; who will judge a man by his past history, not by the capacities he may possess for future good——"

He broke off, he had forgotten to whom he was speaking, and that this woman could not possibly understand him . . . . how could she, when his heart was to himself a riddle that he had not yet solved?

"Sir—Mr. Rideout," said Prue firmly, "if there's any reason why you shouldn't come after Miss Mignon, if it's the leastest wrong that you'll be doing her in trying to win

her love, then, sir, let me pray you to go your ways and leave her in peace, for 'tis a precious young life, and there's trouble enough in store for her without any more coming to her through a sweetheart—and there's other beautiful young ladies in the world besides her."

"There is only one Mignon . . . . and any man who tells you that I mean anything but honestly by her, lies! God knows I love her too dearly to bring the shadow of sin or shame upon her innocent head; but there are things that, told you by a stranger, might make you believe me to be dishonourable and unworthy of her, and such things I charge you not to believe or repeat to her; she could never again be to me what she now is, if one doubt or fear of me had ever crossed her mind. . . ."

"And if it's the truth you're telling me, sir," said Prue, touched in spite of herself, "and if you love her so well as that, and are free to court her honest, then I'll tell her no word agen you; but more than this I cannot promise, nor will I take any more letters from you to her, nor from her to you."

"From her to me?" he repeated rapidly. "Have you then given her a letter from me—has she replied to it?"

Prue, making no reply, quickened her pace. On one point her mind was made up—she would keep her word to the stranger, whoever he might be, and the letter should be given back that night into the hands of her mistress. For the rest, Rosemary was but a few steps away, and it was with a sigh of relief that she pushed open the gate, and passed into the carriage-drive which approached the house in a

circular form, having in its centre, and opposite the hall-door, a colony of thriving evergreens and shrubs. Was it fancy, or did she see, some distance ahead of her, a gleam of something white or grey? She could not be sure.

"Not so fast," cried Rideout, dashing after her; "you've not answered my question yet."

A dozen steps more would bring her to the hall-door, and she would be safe, or so she thought; but Rideout caught her by the arm, holding her so tightly that to move was impossible.

"Now," he said, "did your mistress reply to that letter, or did she not?"

The light from the hall lamp fell upon Prue's ugly, perturbed countenance, and on the dark, reckless beauty of his.

"You are deceiving me," he cried angrily, "I see it in your face. What's that?" Prue's hand had involuntarily tightened upon the pocket containing the letter, and his keen glance had instantly detected the gesture. "Ha!" he cried, "upon my soul I believe you are hiding something there——" With a dexterous movement of his sinewy hand, he wrenched hers away, snatched the letter from the pocket, glanced at the address, and then tossed hand and letter high above his head in triumph. "You fool!" he cried scornfully, "so you meant to cheat me out of it—you thought yourself a match for me, did you?" Then his manner and voice changed all in a moment: "A letter from Mignon .... my little Mignon ...." he said.

A hand and grey-coated arm issued noiselessly from the laurel-bush behind him, a finger and thumb alighted like a butterfly on the lightly-held letter, closed on it, and vanished as noiselessly as they had appeared.

CHAPTER VI.

"A falsehood in its contrary, as great
As my trust was."

THE birds were chattering, twittering, gossiping, flirting, and quarrelling as energetically as though they had not had the use of their tongues for six months, instead of six hours—for a bird's summer night is a very little longer.

A young man in waistcoat and shirt-sleeves, who stood on a ladder, and leaned his arms on the top of the garden-wall, turned round once or twice impatiently, as though he would have liked to scatter the gossipers, but they took no notice of him—not they!

Man may have dominion over the beasts of the field, but it is to be doubted if he have any over the birds of the air, save that which brute force commands. He may capture, torture, and destroy their bodies, but their spirits he reaches —never.

The dog clings with a more than human fidelity to the hand that chastises and caresses him, the cat creeps homeward night by night to the home that feeds and shelters her; all creation bows more or less to the yoke imposed upon it

—all save the birds, who ask of man no other boon than that of liberty.

They care no more for his frowns than his smiles; his angry passions affect them no more than does his tender pity for them when they are starved, and cold, and wretched . . . . a flirt of the wings so long as they can fly, a scrap of a song so long as their slender throats can utter sound, and away they go, heedless, irresponsive, thankless, neither to be tamed nor taught of man, unless he confines them in a cage, and deprives them of the final cause of their existence.

But mark! when he opens the door of the prison-house, how the bird will fly upward, like an arrow sped from a bow; weak and half-dead though he may be, he prefers to die out in God's air, to dying in the care of man, who has not, with all his gentleness, contrived to establish his power over the brave, self-reliant spirit that breathes in that insignificant, frail little ball of feathers.

"I have a great mind to go over," said the person in shirt-sleeves; "for who is likely to be out at this time of the morning?"

He sat down on the wall, drew the ladder up after him, and dropped it on the other side.

"A means of exit if I am caught," he said to himself as he descended, "but that's not likely. A dull place," he added, as he stood on the gravel-walk, and surveyed the gooseberry, currant, and raspberry bushes that in due season provide Miss Sorel's table with fruit-pies.

Opposite him was set Mignon's wooden chair, and on the

ground by its side reposed a bulky volume of Grimm's "Goblins." Opening it, he saw written on the title-page, "Mignon, her book," and he smiled as he laid it down again.

Under the chair lay the half-finished handkerchief, and beside it a tiny silver thimble; the latter he tried to fit on the tips of each of his fingers in turn—unsuccessfully. Turning round to give the garden a last look before remounting the ladder, he found himself face to face with a young woman. Now, at six o'clock in the morning, young women are as a rule in their beds, so that the trespasser had some excuse for looking, as he felt, profoundly astonished, and very much taken aback.

He might also have looked like a fool, had not his features been formed by Nature to express good sense.

Mignon blushed, and it being the first time she had ever blushed at the sight of a man, she overdid the colour very much, or the colour overdid her, until she looked like a rose glowing freshly with every breath that stirs its heart.

She faced him thus for a quarter of a minute, after which she looked at him calmly and said:

"And pray who are you?"

There was a moment's silence, then the answer came:

"I am Adam, the gardener."

He made a slight gesture towards the ladder and garden beyond.

"O!" she said, and now her face was swept as clean of colour as though the red rose had turned to a white one. Perhaps she had blushed because she thought him to be Rideout; perhaps she was disappointed—who can tell?

"And if you are the gardener from next door," she said, frowning, "pray what do you do in here? If the fruit were ripe, I should have my suspicions about you, for we lost twelve peaches and nine nectarines last year, but really, just now," she lifted her head and glanced about her disdainfully, "we have nothing here but—snails!"

If it be the property and sign of virtue indignantly to repudiate unjust suspicion, then was not Adam virtuous; for he let the slur on his probity go by, and merely remarked:

"They're very bad this year, miss—snails."

"And it is not at all polite to walk into other people's gardens in this way," said Mignon, sitting down and picking up her work and her thimble. "I'm sure I don't know what Miss Sorel would say if she could see you—you must never do it again, you know!"

"Of course not, miss," said Adam, backing towards the ladder; "not but what I should be very happy to be of use to you at any time: and if you should happen to want any little odd jobs done about the place, such as weeding, miss or the plants watered, or anything of that sort, you've only got just to pop your head over the garden-wall, and say 'Adam,' and I'll be with you in a moment."

'Thank you—Adam," said Mignon doubtfully. "The fact is, I should be glad of a little assistance sometimes, especially when I let the fowls out. Bumble always tries to fly away, and it would be such a dreadful thing if he did—still I don't think I can call you—your master may not like it, to say nothing of our having no ladder; it's so very mannish, you see, for a ladies' school—so I don't quite see

how I can pop my head over the wall—thank you all the same!"

"Why, as to the ladder, miss," said Adam, "that's easily managed, for I can leave you this one; and as to my master, he won't make any objections—he's away."

"Don't talk in that manner," said Mignon, frowning again. "You ought to do exactly the same behind his back as you do to his face."

Adam coughed. There was nothing remarkable in the cough, but somehow it set Mignon asking herself whether she would have liked Miss Sorel to see the love-letter she had received, and the answer she had written the day before.

She looked the gardener full in the face for the first time, and met his eyes. Honest eyes they were, of that grey colour that is usually supposed to denote great intellectual power, but small capacity for loving; whereas it is rather the true lover's colour, being less changeable than the blue, and more expressive than the brown or black.

"What a strange face for a gardener!" thought Mignon, her eyes travelling slowly downwards, and resting on his earth-stained hands.

"Has your master a pretty garden—over there?" she said.

"Yes," he replied, "and plenty of flowers all a-blow; and a fountain and summer-house and shady walks—it's a gay place, very."

He stood before her, looking down upon the slim young figure, the slowly-moving needle, the curly bent head, thinking how he might invent some excuse for looking at her a few moments longer.

"It is a fine morning," he said; but whether this remark was the result of the cudgelling of his brains, or a determined attempt to compel a glance of surprise from her at its egregious absurdity, it would be hard to say.

She looked up, wondering why he did not go away . . . she had, in fact, forgotten his presence; for her thoughts were fixed upon more serious matters, as she considered them to be.

"It could not well be finer," she said.

There was a pause, while the girl glanced at the young man as men and women generally glance at individuals of a different class from themselves—less as though they are creatures of flesh and blood, than as at inanimate chattels.

"It is not going to rain," said Adam, either from sheer stupidity, or with a hope that his folly might win from her a smile at his expense.

But, alas! not only did she not smile, but, apparently considering that this remark required no answer at all, she worked industriously on.

"Good-morning, miss!" he said at last; "and now," thought he, "she will have to look me in the face again."

"Oh, good-morning!" she said, without raising her eyes. "I thought you were gone long ago!"

He mounted a few rungs of the ladder, lingered, looked back, lost himself for a full minute in the contemplation of that rose-leaf face, then said, in the most modest of voices, "Good-morning, miss!"

"Good-morning!" she replied abstractedly, and without looking up.

What was her surprise to hear, at least two minutes later, a voice remarking, high above her, "Good-morning, miss!"

It was too much. The smile for which he had waited flashed out like a ray of sunlight, and all her dimples showed as she looked up and said for the third time, "Good-morning!" But even on the top of the wall he paused to gaze down upon her ere he dropped on the other side and vanished.

"What an extraordinary person!" said Mignon, aloud. "But oh, I am so hungry!"

Prue at this moment appeared, her eyes fixed upon the tray she carried, on which was arranged Mignon's breakfast, consisting of a cup of coffee, a plate of bread-and-butter, and a brown egg of not more than two days old, if its outward appearance did not sadly belie its inner.

"There!" said Prue, setting down the tray on Mignon's lap. "I got it for you as quick as I could, but what made you come out so early this morning?"

"The birds made such a noise," said Mignon, tasting her coffee, "and, as I couldn't sleep, I got up. Now, what do you suppose has happened to me this morning? What would you say if I told you I had already had a visitor?"

Prue jumped; it was more than a start—it was a jump.

"A visitor, miss!" she said, turning pale; "and pray who might that be?"

"A young man," said Mignon, tapping the brown egg smartly, "and an uncommonly good-looking one too! I am going to begin a diary to-day, and write in it, 'Spoke to a young man for the first time in my life, and he was——'"

"Who?"

"Ah! wouldn't you like to know? He alighted from the clouds, or, more vulgarly speaking, arrived by the aid of a ladder; and he came for—what do you think?"

"I don't know, Miss Mignon," said Prue, breathless with impatience; "what a tease you are to be sure!"

"Snails!" said Mignon, looking regretfully at the now empty egg-shell. "And whenever I want to speak to him, I'm to pop my head over the garden wall and call out——"

"Yes," said Prue, on tenter-hooks, "call out what?"

"Not Mr. Rideout!" said Mignon; "though, indeed, it is almost a pity. Just think of the opportunities one would have for writing and receiving love-letters over a wall with a PAIR of ladders!"

"Then, if 'twasn't Mr. Rideout," said Prue, considerably relieved, her thoughts reverting to the mysterious man in grey, "who could it have been, and what was his name, miss?"

"It was only the gardener from next door, by name Adam," said Mignon. "And, do you know, I do not think that he is quite right in his head, for he wished me good-morning three times! But tell me, do you think I shall get a letter from Mr. Rideout this morning? It is very odd that he should not have sent one back to me when you gave him mine. Did he not seem pleased with it, Prue?"

"Pleased enough," said Prue, turning away her head and recalling her last view of Rideout, in pursuit of the thief who had stolen the letter.

"But didn't he say anything?" said Mignon, puzzled by something in Prue's manner.

"Miss Mignon," said the woman slowly, "you'd best put him out of your head for a bit, anyways till Miss Sorel comes back, for p'r'aps it won't come to nothing after all; and if it should turn out as he's no good——"

"'No good!'" said Mignon, "and 'nothing come of it!' why, you don't suppose I want to marry him—do you, Prue? He can hold a pen, can he not, and has got a heart that feels? I don't want any more than that—indeed, I shouldn't know what to do with any other attentions; and if he'll only go on writing me some nice love-letters, he may be as nasty as he pleases! I'm not likely ever to speak to him, you know!"

"He's got a will and a way of his own," said Prue, shaking her head; "and it would not astonish me if he came swaggering into the garden this very minute and said, 'Miss Mignon, I've come to marry you;' and it's my belief that if he said so you'd have to do it, miss!"

CHAPTER VII.

"It's no matter what you do
If your heart be only true,
And his heart was true to Poll,"

Mignon sang, as she liberally dispensed the barley she held up in her apron.

"I do wish," she went on, discarding song for commonplace prose, and addressing the hens who scrambled and pushed about her feet, "that you would take pattern by

Bumble, who is the soul of politeness, instead of gobbling away as though you were eating for a wager. There can't be a ghost of a digestion among you—perhaps that's why you're so tough and nasty when you're eaten; whereas a little common politeness would make you far more respectable in life, and satisfactory in death, if only you could be brought to think so! There!" she added, letting fall her apron with its few remaining grains, and smiling at the scrimmage that ensued, "that's all; so you need not perk your heads about in that inquisitive way, for you won't get any more for ever so long!"

She sauntered towards her accustomed seat, and the feathered flock followed close upon her heels, imagining that where so much barley had been, more might yet be found.

"I can't help feeling sorry for you," she said, sitting down and addressing them indifferently; "you must find it so horribly dull with nothing to do but scratch, scratch, from morning till night, and look forward to meal-times! You have not even the excitement of a good rousing quarrel now and then, but peck at one another in a cowardly half-hearted fashion, that can't relieve your feelings one bit!"

The hens did not understand these remarks, and after standing about for some time in various attitudes of despondency and expectation, they separated and spread about the garden, all save Bumble, the cock, who flew in a clumsy manner to the top of the garden-wall, and from thence uttered a loud and derisive cock-a-doodle-doo! that awoke warlike echoes in the gardens round about.

"Oh, Bumble!" cried Mignon, in despair, "that is the third time you have played me this trick in one week! Now I should like to know how on earth I am to get you down again?"

Bumble, however, had no intention of leaving a place so much to his liking; so his only reply to this appeal was to flap his wings fiercely, toss his head proudly, and nearly dislocate his neck in a still louder note of triumph, speedily answered by his feathered brethren from half a dozen adjoining gardens in every imaginable key—high and clear, husky and deep, shrill and quavering, hoarse and grumbling, weak and piping, every note in the gamut of cock-a-doodle-doo-dum swelled the inharmonious concert.

Having scaled the wall with a purpose, Bumble did not pause to indulge himself in half an hour or so of crowing, as was his wont of mornings, when time hung particularly heavy on his hands, but set out with a lordly strut, and an evident intention of taking one of those unauthorised and vagabond rambles that were a source of peril to his neck, and grief to his mistress; for if he was brave, he was also foolhardy, and he had occasionally returned from similar excursions so severely mauled as to lead Mignon to suppose that he had met with more kicks than barley by the way.

"He is going," she cried, her eyes anxiously fixed on the extreme tip of his vanishing tail. "Oh! what shall I do?"

Her glance fell upon the ladder, and it suggested a resource. To climb the ladder was the work of a moment, and, on looking over the top of the wall, she discovered Adam digging with his back turned to her.

"Adam!" she said breathlessly, "quick—Bumble! he will be lost! Don't you think you could manage to catch him for me?"

But before Adam could answer, fortune interposed on Mignon's behalf in a somewhat ludicrous manner.

As Bumble went on his way rejoicing, his toes well turned out, and perking his head from side to side, he came suddenly face to face with a cat, who was also taking the air from an eminence, and whose approach he did not perceive till his feathers actually touched her fur.

He recoiled with a start so violent as to prove conclusively that a fowl has nerves; indeed, he could not have looked more horrified if he had met a fox prepared to strangle and eat him, feathers, bones, and all.

"What a godsend!" cried Mignon, in prodigious excitement. "If only she would chase him back!"

"If only they would stay looking at each other for ever," thought Adam, gazing up at the innocent face that bloomed in all its delicate colours high above him.

But, alas for his hopes, the matter was decided in a few seconds. Puss claiming the right of way, and Bumble being in far too much of a fluster to efface himself in her favour, she flew at him tooth and claw; while he, reversing himself with extraordinary rapidity, raced homewards with outstretched neck and flapping wings, nor rested until he had floundered headlong into the bosom of his family.

"Oh!" said Mignon, with a sigh of relief, "that was lucky! Good afternoon! I'm just as much obliged to you as if you had caught Bumble, you know!"

She nodded blithely, and vanished so suddenly, as to plunge Adam, who had by no means reckoned on so speedy a disappearance, into despair.

Were his wits never to be at hand when he wanted them? he asked himself angrily, as he stood looking at the bare wall.

A good general, however, does not pause to bemoan a blunder, but sets to work to repair it. Before ten seconds had elapsed he had mounted his ladder, and was looking over into the adjacent garden. Alas! it was empty of all save Bumble, who stood, the image of discomfiture, among his wives, who may, for aught we know to the contrary, have been twitting him with the ignominious end of his expedition. "Such an opportunity," Adam said to himself ruefully, "and to have missed it like that!"

Apparently minded to take a little holiday, he folded his arms on the top of the wall, rested his chin upon them, and refreshed his eyes with a good stare at the prospect before him.

Adam did not tire of this amusement until a faint sound in the distance struck upon his ear, whereupon, and with such extreme rapidity as might lead any one on the other side to suppose that the perch on which he stood had ingloriously collapsed, he disappeared from the summit of the wall.

Footsteps were coming into the garden, voices were drawing near, and in a very few moments he enjoyed the happiness of parting the wallflower's leaves, thus getting an excellent bird's-eye view of Mignon and Prue.

The woman was, as usual, sitting down; the girl standing

with her hands behind her back, and her voice a little raised in positive assertion.

"Yes!" she was saying, "on one point I am resolved—we will do something, Prue! we will lead a gay life, you and I, for at least three whole days, beginning at eight o'clock to-morrow morning! And in the first place we will go to Madame Tussaud's."

"Yes, miss," said Prue, immensely relieved at finding Mignon's intentions resolve themselves into nothing worse than a visit to the wax figures.

"The day after to-morrow," continued Mignon, "we will go to Hampton Court—but not by train, or in any way that we have ever been before, or are likely to go again—we will go on donkeys."

"No, miss, we won't," said Prue, with unlooked-for decision; "you'll not demean yourself in that way while I've got the charge of you. But if we could hear of a respectable shay now——"

"A shay costs money," said Mignon, shaking her head, and pursing up her lips; "you must have a man to drive, and then the horse will want a feed—and I have only got ten shillings and sixpence in the world to last me till Miss Sorel comes back. I must not spend all my money on trips, though, because—are all gardeners handsome, Prue?"

The apparently irrelevant question bore reference to something that was then in her mind.

"I don't know, miss—about the same as other folks, I s'p'ose. They're mostly dirty fellows—'bliged to be with the work they do—and terrible fond of their beer and 'baccy."

"But this one is not dirty at all," said Mignon, puzzled. "His shirt-sleeves are as white as snow: and he does not look as if he were fond of beer—not in the least!"

"This one?" said Prue; "and pray who may that be, miss?"

"The gardener from next door," said the girl. "I saw him just now. He was going to help me to catch Bumble. Now do you think he would be very much offended if I were to offer him half-a-crown. Then he would be sure to help me at any future time, and even keep an eye upon the fowls when I happen to be away."

"Offended!" said Prue, "he'd jump at it, miss. But why should you do that—when you've got so little, too? And he won't be a bit grateful to you for it, neither;" by which it would appear that Prue knew her own class thoroughly.

"But I don't want him to be grateful," said Mignon; "it's enough pleasure to me to give it. It's a great luxury," she added, sighing, "the greatest of all under the sun, to give!"

The young man who listened to the foregoing conversation must have been very greedy, as well as dishonourable, for at the young lady's first intimation of her intentions, he uttered a stifled exclamation of delight!

"Half-a-crown," he said to himself. "I wonder when will she give it me? To-morrow? The day after, the next? If I watched Prue safely off the premises and went over, might she not even give it me to-day?"

He vowed in his heart that he would at the earliest opportunity make his way into her presence; and, in case she should have forgotten her intention, LOOK half-crowns at her

with all his might—only he must be quick about it, or she would spend all her money; she might not have another half-crown to give away for months and months, and then where would he be?

Clearly there was no time to be wasted; he must waylay her on the morrow (here a question as to the possibility of getting suitable holiday attire in which to go to Madame Tussaud's obtruded itself disagreeably upon his mind), and it should go hard with him if he did not catch her away from Prue, and gain the promised *pourboire*.

For the rest, no lover ever watched the varying expression of a capricious mistress's eye more fondly and faithfully, than he did the tip of Bumble's vagabond tail. Might not Bumble be the means of guiding him to the end to which his ambitions pointed?

He fell asleep that night as happy as a king, with the vision before him of Mignon presenting him with a bright half-crown, while the pleasures of Hope were represented by Bumble majestically vanishing in the distance.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Ye who have yearned
With too much love, will here stay and pity
For the mere sake of truth."

MIGNON stood with her hands behind her back, gazing at Mr. Cobbett, who sat at the foot of the Sleeping Beauty, neatly dressed, with his snuff-box in his hand, and turning

his head slowly from side to side, as though he were trying to overhear some of the pure English that he loved. She never could divest herself of the belief that he was alive, though she had long got over the amazed wonder with which she had at first beheld the other gorgeously-attired ladies and gentlemen. After a visit to the more modern royal personages in whom she took an interest, she sat down before Henry and his six wives, thinking for the fiftieth time how exactly like a big fat, tyrannical turkey-cock he looked, surrounded by a flock of timid, helpless hens. Surely he must have been made of strange stuff, to keep his complexion as purely red and white as that of a village beauty in her teens, when he had so many crimes upon his mind? Did these poor murdered queens come stepping softly to his side when he lay a-dying, whispering, "How does it taste to you, this bitterness of death?" He was a sorry knave, after all, in spite of his kingly air and presence!

The morning was not very old, still a few people were strolling about, and, as usual, were to be seen half a dozen of those courting couples, who do not consider they have seen London unless they have paid a visit to the "wax figures," and who combine the triple enjoyment of criticism, courtship, and refreshment in a manner apparently agreeable and satisfactory.

Perhaps because Mignon was so used to them all, she found the waxen people a little dull that morning; therefore, it was with a decided sense of pleasure that she saw passing, at some little distance from her, somebody whose figure seemed familiar to her, a somebody who looked as

though his clothes and he were not on good terms with each other, and recognised the gardener, Adam.

She jumped up, and ran after him.

"Is that you, Adam?" she said, delighted at having a chance of speaking to somebody; "and have you got a little holiday to-day?"

"Yes, miss," he said; and the girl thought, a little enviously, how happy he looked, and how thoroughly he seemed to be enjoying himself!

"You could not possibly come to a better place to spend it," she said gravely. She looked for all the world like a freshly-plucked bunch of violets, he thought, in her white gown and hat, with their dark-blue ribbons. "It will give you an excellent idea of English history, and every young man who wishes to improve his mind should know something of the great men of his country."

"Yes, miss," said Adam, with unabated gravity.

"Though I don't suppose you've got as far as French history yet," she said, apparently delighted with the sound of her own voice; "still, I dare say you may have heard of Marie Antoinette? There she is!" said the girl, nodding towards her. "Prue always calls her Maria, because she can't pronounce her name the right way."

"Ah!" said Adam; "some of those French words are quite beyond most folks."

"Of course they are," said Mignon, with dignity, "and I should never advise you to attempt to understand them. The three 'R's' are quite enough for any respectable young man, and 'a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.'"

"Yes, miss," he said, and waited for more.

Instructing him by the way, she came presently to a stop before Mary Queen of Scots.

"I think you must have heard of her," she said gravely; "everybody has. She was wicked, you know" (she shook her head and looked solemn); "she had too many husbands: just as Henry over there had too many wives; and they both got into a very bad way of killing off the ones they did not like, so that of course it was not possible for any one to approve of either of them."

"Of course not," said Adam, looking profoundly impressed, and only hoping that she might have time to expound to him the whole catalogue before Prue swooped down upon, and routed him.

But Mignon's thoughts had taken a new turn. She was looking towards the turnstile in the distance, through which people passed in twos and threes, all looking expectant and eager, some frightened.

"Adam," she said, "have you ever been into the Chamber of Horrors?"

"Yes, miss, once."

"Was it very awful? Did it haunt you for days and weeks and months afterwards?"

"No," he said, smiling a little; "but were you thinking of going in?"

"Should you say that a person would be likely to tumble down in a fit?" she went on, disregarding his question.

"Not unless she were subject to fits at any other time."

"You are sure you would not like to go in again, Adam?" she asked.

"I should love to, miss."

"Then so you shall," she said briskly; "but you mustn't speak to me, unless you see I'm very much frightened, only if you can't understand everything, and come to me, I'll explain it to you."

"Yes, miss."

"By the bye," she said, growing rather red, and putting her hand in her pocket, "you smoke tobacco, Adam, do you not, and you drink beer?"

"Yes, miss."

"Then will you—will you mind accepting something to buy some?"

With the true shamefacedness of the generous giver, she thrust the half-crown into Adam's hand, which did not close modestly and secretly upon the gift, as surely it should have done; but, on the contrary, received it publicly, openly, the silver coin lying upon the open palm as a respectable fact that all the world was welcome to behold.

Adam looked musingly down at the half-crown, as though it were the first piece of money he had ever seen in his life.

"Thank you, miss," he said at last, and put it away in his pocket.

Mignon heaved a sigh of relief; thank goodness that business was over. Then she paid two sixpences at the turnstile, and, with a fast-beating heart stepped over the threshold of that grisly abode of which she had heard

such terrible stories; but she felt relieved when she beheld no more or less than a waxen assemblage of ordinary men and women, and circulating among them a score or so of real flesh and blood people, who chattered and stared, apparently unimpressed by the atmosphere of murder.

And yet when Mignon's eye was caught by the cast of Ravaillac's head, taken after death, and she went near to examine it—when she noted the cruel, protruded lips, the stealthy eyes, the brand of murderer upon every line of his face, that had outlived the inconceivable horror of the death he died—she began to understand why this room was indeed terrible, why it had so powerfully affected the minds of some who entered it, because it was a record of true things, because every silent figure there was the representative of a cowardly atrocious crime—because, side by side with the destroyer of life, one beheld in imagination the victim or victims, and saw enacted the whole frightful tragedy.

Mignon had not been a minute in the room when a gentleman, who had just entered, with a young lady by his side, caught sight of the girl's profile, and made a step or two forward as though to join her. Recovering himself quickly, however, he said something in a low tone to his companion.

"Yes—let us go," she answered coldly and wearily; and what a strange voice it was to issue from such young and beautiful lips!

"It was a foolish fancy—no more—that made me enter"—her tone changed with the last words to a passionate wistfulness that belied their lightness, and words and tone

alike, though uttered at some distance, pierced to Mignon's ears, and produced upon her an instantaneous and extraordinary effect. For some seconds she stood perfectly motionless, then, shaking off the spell that bound her, she gazed wildly around.

"Muriel!" she cried. "Muriel!"

The cry sounded strange in the dismal room, and the people fell back from her as she ran hither and thither, with outstretched arms and a look of joy in her eyes, that changed to despair as there came no answer back to her, and all around her she saw but the immovable faces of the waxen people, and the astonished faces of the living crowd.

Then happened a curious thing, that those present have never forgotten. The girl stood quite still, and there broke from her lips the refrain of Herrick's once famous Madrigal:

"Cherry ripe! ripe, ripe I cry,
True and faire ones come and buy!
Come and buy . . . . ."*

Then she paused, lifted her hand, and waited for the burden of the song to be taken up by other lips. There was not a sound save of the distant footsteps that went to and fro, and the muttered exclamations of the crowd. She took up the verse again.

"If so be you ask me where
They doe grow, I answer, There:
Where my Julia's lips doe smile
There's the land or cherry-ile!"

* Old version of song.

Here the voice that had started so bravely with its lilt, died away into a passionate quivering sob. . . .

"I shall lose her!" she cried, "I shall lose her!" and the people all fell back to make way for her as she ran through the antechamber, and the Hall of Kings. Hindered here, jostled there, she yet reached the street entrance in time to see a carriage driving rapidly away, from which there looked a girl's face, brown eyed, brown haired, fair as the day, the face of Mignon's lost sister, Muriel,

"Muriel!" she cried. "Muriel!" Hopeful and overjoyed, she dashed after her in swift pursuit.

Lost in the sea of traffic, bewildered, confused, she yet pushed blindly on. . . . There was the carriage in the distance that held her darling, and she must get to it . . . . if only these cruel carts and cabs would not come between; if only she could pass that great van before her! The slender little figure in white made a sudden perilous dash forwards, slipped and fell. . . . The driver, occupied in chaffing a passing acquaintance, saw nothing. The horses went stolidly on. Some one, who had followed her all the way, came from behind and caught her in his arms—caught her from the death that in another moment would have come to her at the hoofs of those stolid, well-fed horses.

"Let me go!" she cried, struggling fiercely to free herself; "do you know what you are doing? I shall never find her now—never! And oh! how I hate you and I wish that you were dead!"

CHAPTER IX.

"The pearliest dew not brings
Such morning incense from the fields of May,
As do those brighter drops that twinkling stray
From those kind eyes—the very home and haunt
Of sisterly affection."

A YOUNG man who was digging in his garden with great industry and vigour, and who sent his spadefuls of mould flying hither and thither, as though they were missiles, suddenly paused in his toil and looked around.

Something had happened. At the top of the garden-wall bloomed a flower that was never grown by sunshine, wind, or rain; that had a wistful, delicate face, and a pair of blue eyes which looked anxiously at the gardener; that was, in short, Mignon.

The woes of the very young leave the eyes clear as crystal, bright as the day, and are as quickly dried as is the silver dew upon the morning grass. So was it with Mignon, and Adam, throwing down his spade and looking up at that gentle apparition, discovered in her face no sign of the passionate anger and grief that had convulsed her yesterday. On the contrary, she had a timid air, and her voice was extremely low and somewhat faltering as she said:

"Adam!"

"Yes, miss.

"I should like to speak to you."

"To speak to me, miss?"

"Yes, if you do not mind."

He fetched a ladder, fixed it against the wall, and in another moment there was but a hand's-breadth between the girl's face and his.

"I want to ask you a question," she said, hanging her head, and looking sorely ashamed. "Supposing that you loved somebody very dearly, better than anything else upon earth, and you had lost her, and were always thinking of her day and night, and longing for the time when you would find her again, to part from her never any more, and it happened one day, by the strangest chance, that she was quite near you, almost within reach of your hand, and you knew that if you could only get to her, the long weary waiting would be all over, and you would look into her very face, hear her very voice, and almost die for pure gladness, would you not for the moment hate any one who came between you and her, yes, and wish with all your heart that he was dead?"

"I should hate him," said Adam, "with all my heart."

"No," she said gently, "you would not, though in your anger you might be so wicked as to think you did; and afterwards, when you found how that person had saved your life, at the risk of his own, would you not feel so desperately sorry and ashamed of yourself that you would be quite afraid to look that person in the face?"

He was beginning to understand her meaning now, and a sudden brightness overspread his features.

"And was it that you wished to say to me, Miss Mignon?" It was curious how different her name sounded on his lips from Prue's literal and English pronunciation of

it. "Why, I thought nothing of your words—people say a great many things when they're angry that they don't mean, and I haven't given those a single thought." They had, however, never ceased to ring in his ears since the time that she had uttered them.

"Have you not?" she said joyfully; "then that is all right, and we will forget all about it, and—would you mind my shaking hands with you, Adam?"

He took her soft fair little hand in his brown earth-stained one, looking down upon it as though he held some rare and costly jewel, unfamiliar yet beautiful to his eyes. Then he laid it down on the wall as carefully as though he feared it might break.

"Thank you, miss."

"She will thank you better than I ever can," she went on, "for what you have done for me; and she will scold me—ever so gently—for putting myself into that state, because I could not overtake her, for she will say, 'And if you saw me in London, might you not have been sure that I should come straight off to you at Rosemary as soon as ever I was able?' only, you see, I did not think about that, but only that she would not answer when I called her—no, nor even listen, when I sang the old song."

"And if she can love a sister in this fashion," thought Adam, "what will not her love be when her heart awakens at last to the lover and the husband?"

She had paused in her speech, not because she had suddenly become conscious that she was talking too freely to the young gardener—she was too absolutely ignorant of the

laws of society for that—moreover, her instincts were too pure and good to lead her astray, or cause her to take him for any other than the honest man that he was; but because there was in her mind the memory of a tender foolish promise that she and Muriel had made long years ago. It was that if either should find herself separated from the other, she was to go through the world as Blondel did in his search for Richard Cœur de Lion, singing the favourite song agreed upon between them; for with the song on the lips of the one, the echo in the heart of the other, how could they fail to find each other at last, as the faithful Blondel sought and found his master?

To their childlike faith all things had seemed possible, and now that separation had indeed come, they were to Mignon possible still . . . . though it might be doubted if there remained to that other lost, beloved sister one article of the simple creed that had sufficed to her in the far-away innocent days of her girlhood.

"But now," said Mignon, heaving a deep sigh of delight, "it is all coming straight; and if she does not come to-day, she will be sure to come to-morrow, and we shall be together all the rest of our lives, and, I hope, go away from here."

"You would go away from here," said Adam abruptly, "go away altogether, miss?"

"I hope so," she said gaily; "indeed, why should I stay a day longer than I am obliged, when I have nothing on earth to leave but the fowls and the raspberry and currant bushes, for of course Prue would come too?"

'You are right," he said; "you have nothing else to leave."

Something in his voice arrested the girl's attention.

"Would you too like to be going away? Do you sometimes grow tired of gardening all the year round, as I do of my lessons and idleness?"

"Sometimes," he said.

"And yet it is a beautiful garden." She leaned her arms upon the wall, and gazed at the trim well-kept fruit-trees and the smart flower-garden beyond; "I don't think I could ever be dull with all those flowers for companions—they seem to me to be far better company than some people are!"

"Would you like a bunch, Miss Mignon?" he said, thinking that he saw his way to enjoying at least an hour of her society.

"Are you sure your master would not mind?" she asked, doubtfully; "of course I should like to have them, but——"

"Then so you shall," said Adam; "I'll bring them over to you in less than two minutes, miss."

And with that, the brown head disappeared from one side of the wall, the fair one from the other, and Mignon betook herself to the wooden chair that had never held her in so bright and joyous a mood as was hers to-day.

She looked around at the homely uncared-for garden, and found it fair and pleasant, as she thought how in a few hours Muriel's eyes would have fallen upon it; she glanced at the sour green gooseberries, and smiled to think that, after all, it was very likely she should not be here to eat them. And then Adam reappeared, bearing an old mat

and a gardening-knife in one hand, and a great nosegay of roses in the other.

The roses were as sweet as though they had been grown a hundred miles from London, and, as Mignon's hand closed upon them, she saw not the four grey walls that shut her in, but the stately terraces and brilliant rose-gardens of her beautiful birthplace, Silverhoe. She saw this same garden every day, and each night before she slept she walked in fancy all about it; in the winter, when the snow was on the ground, and in the summer, when it was all green and beautiful . . . there were no high walls to shut her in, and prevent her getting a good breath of God's air, but all was open and free, where she could wander up and down, and in and out, and nowhere be met by bolts and bars and other people's gardens and houses and busy roads. It had used to be her joy to watch the seasons, and to await the coming out of the flowers one by one, from the first moss-cup that she called her winter rose, to the early boisterous February days, when the violet roots began to gather their scent, and the hawthorn buds would come stealing out like forgotten snow from the bare black stalks, while to the laggard primroses and windflowers she would stoop down and whisper:

"Come out! come out! spring is rushing upon us, and you are all behindhand and nothing will be ready; how will you look then?"

It was her foolish fancy that they came a little the faster for her asking them, because they knew she loved them every one, and was so wearying for a sight of their pretty delicate faces . . . . Adam looked at the girl, and there passed

through his mind—surely it was strange that a gardener should have known them by heart—the lines:

"Fold
A rose-leaf round thy finger's taperness
And soothe thy lips . . . ."

But aloud he said:

"As I have nothing to do this afternoon, perhaps you will allow me to give the garden a little weeding, miss?"

"Oh yes," she answered, absently, being far too much taken up with her treasures to mind what he did, or did not do.

Having looked all about, and decided that the weeds grew thickest in the immediate neighbourhood of Mignon, Adam deposited his mat at about two yards from her feet.

Setting to work in a very business-like and energetic fashion, he had presently a symmetrical row of green tufts before him, and no sound save the scrape, scrape of his knife broke the silence.

Any one coming suddenly upon the pair would have said that over their weeds and flowers, these two people were thinking very deeply; and so they were, only the thoughts of one were far more profound than those of the other.

"Adam," said Mignon at last, laying her roses down in her lap, "have you got a sweetheart?"

The question was put with such perfect good faith, moreover with such absolute confidence in a serious reply, that it was equally impossible to resent, or to evade the question.

"Perhaps, miss," he said smiling; and it was extraordi-

nary the difference a smile made to his face—it turned its power to sweetness, altogether displacing a certain sternness that distinguished it. "Why, miss?"

"Because, if you had not," she said, lowering her voice, "I know of somebody who would just suit you—a very fine woman; and of course you like a fine woman—do you not, Adam?"

"Pretty well, miss," said Adam, whose taste rather inclined to the *petite* in womankind.

"And you would not mind her being a little older than yourself?" said Mignon; "you would not consider that an objection?"

"Not if I liked her," said Adam, smiling, "but I won't ask you to trouble about it on my account, miss, because—" he lifted his head and looked her full in the face—"I'm suited."

"Have you quite made up your mind?" she said, looking greatly disappointed; "do you think she would mind very much if you married somebody else?"

"I don't know about her," he said, smiling, "but I should mind it, miss."

"It is a great pity," said Mignon, shaking her head, "for I am sure Prue would have made you a most excellent wife; and then, if ever I have a garden of my own, you could have been my gardener. It is certainly very provoking!"

"You forget, miss," said Adam, "that even if I liked Mrs. Prue, it's very likely she would not have liked me."

"Do you often write love-letters, Adam?" said Mignon gravely.

"Maybe, miss. Why?"

"I only wanted to know," she said, resting her chin on her hand, and her elbow on her knee, "what you would consider a reasonable time to elapse between the writing one and receiving a reply."

"Do you mean if I wrote to her, or she wrote to me, miss?"

"If she wrote to you."

"If I liked her," said Adam; "I should answer it straight off; but if I didn't like her, I should not answer it for two or three days, or perhaps a week."

"Oh!" said Mignon, quite crestfallen. "Then, if a gentleman did not answer a person's letter straight off, you would say he did not care very much about that person?"

She looked so wistful and lovely as she asked the question, that Adam set his teeth hard, thinking, "Can she love him already?"

"One can't always tell, miss," he said aloud. "People go away sometimes, or are ill, or busy, or something."

"But, surely," said Mignon, "a man usually answers a first love-letter—the very first a girl ever wrote to him!"

Adam turned his head aside; he was pale as he said to himself, "Her first love-letter . . . . Mignon's first love-letter . . . . and to him!"

"He would be sure to answer it, miss," he said quietly, if he received it—quite sure!"

He waited for more, but as she did not speak, he went steadily on with his work, and by-and-by the girl picked up a

newspaper lying by her chair, and with a little frown upon her forehead began to read.

Presently she muttered something in an undertone.

"I beg your pardon, miss," said Adam, "but did you speak?"

"No," she said, "at least not to you. I have got into a bad habit of talking out loud. It has occurred to me once or twice that a person might almost hear what I am saying on the other side of the wall!"

Adam, intent on his weeds, blushed.

It was many years since he had done himself so much credit, for he was a cool personage, and not easily put out of countenance, so that this sudden access of colour argued a tenderness of conscience, or a freshness of feeling for which no one who was acquainted with him would have given him credit.

"Why, I declare," said Mignon, regarding him attentively, "you're blushing!"

"It's the heat, miss," said Adam, throwing back his head. "It's warm work, weeding."

He laid down his knife and stood erect, to stretch his cramped limbs perhaps, and a magnificent specimen of manhood he looked; but Mignon was not looking at him: her glance had fallen upon the wheelbarrow, and as she looked she rubbed her eyes, for instead of being a heap of ruins, there it stood, respectably upright.

"Have the pixies been here in the night?" she said, opening her blue eyes still wider, "or have you?"

"It looked untidy, miss," he said, "and so—I mended

it. There's something very handy about a barrow," said Adam reflectively; "one can carry things in it, and one can sit in it, and at a pinch, why one can even take a ride in it; and though you wouldn't believe it, miss, a ride in a barrow is downright exciting, because, you see, there's always the chance that if you don't hold on tight, you'll tumble out."

"But doesn't the wheel ever come off?" said Mignon, red at her own duplicity.

"It won't to-day," said Adam, decidedly.

"I'll have a look at it," said Mignon, rising and approaching her renovated chariot, and thus removing herself from her close proximity to Adam, who had no excuse for changing his own attitude on the instant, and so lost sight of her radiant face. Mignon scrutinised the solidly-repaired wheel, and was secretly longing to find herself once more seated in the primitive vehicle, when the little scene sustained an interruption, summary and unexpected. A door banged violently—the one communicating with the other garden.

Crushing the gravel beneath his hasty footsteps, there advances towards the young lady a handsome young man.

Adam, turning hastily at the sounds, recognises in the new-comer that graceless young *roué* and professed lady-killer, Philip Rideout.

CHAPTER X.

"My restless spirit never could endure
To brood so long upon one luxury,
Unless it did, though fearfully, espy
A hope beyond the shadow of a dream."

ADAM instantly removed himself and his mat to a remote corner of the garden, quite out of earshot, almost out of sight, as though he were used to playing gooseberry every day of his life, and understood the part thoroughly.

Mignon, standing in the middle of the gravel-walk, blushing violently, looked very lovely, but undeniably awkward, as the writer of the first love-letter she had ever received came towards her with eager steps and shining eyes.

"Miss Ferrers—Mignon," he cried impetuously, as he bared his head before her, "forgive this intrusion, but I have no other means of approaching you—and I am driven mad by the obstacles placed in my way—the very letter you wrote me, dear angel, was stolen from me—snatched from my hand ere I had read one syllable of it. Tell me," he cried, "have you some other lover who is seeking to frustrate my hopes with you—some one who is given to stealing letters intended for other people, and who brings you—roses?"

He pointed to the flowers in her hand significantly as he spoke, and looked at her with angry, jealous meaning.

"Somebody stole my letter from you? Did Prue not give it you?"

"I took it from her by force," said Rideout grimly, "and then somebody took it from me—'twas the strangest thing imaginable, but I have my suspicions."

"Oh! what a wicked, wicked woman!" cried Mignon; "and when I asked her every day too, how it was that I got no reply to it?"

"And you cared so much?" cried Rideout ardently; "it was actually a source of regret that you did not hear from me again?"

"Yes," she replied gravely, "indeed it was. When I got up in the morning, I used to say to myself, 'There will be a letter from him to day;' and when the evening came, and Prue always came back without one, I was so bitterly, bitterly disappointed!"

"You were?" he cried in a transport; "but tell me, what did you say in that dear little letter—can you remember?"

"Oh, yes," said Mignon, nodding, "almost word for word, and it was a very nice letter indeed. I was most particular about that, as I was afraid that if you did not like it, you would never write to me again!"

"Like it!" he cried, and stooped his head and pressed his lips against her hand.

She did not draw it away, but looked down with a kind of puzzled wonder at the faint red mark his almost rough caress had left on it.

"There is a three-legged stool about somewhere," she said, looking at him doubtfully, and wishing with all her heart that she had had a lover before, that she might by practice have ascertained whether etiquette did not demand that she should give him the only chair, and fetch the stool for herself.

But as Mr. Rideout turned in search of the proffered seat, he discovered the soles of Adam's feet, and the back of his head and person, as that young man diligently pursued his avocation of weeding in the distance. "Is that your gardener?" he asked; "can't you send him away?"

"Why should I do that?" said she, wondering. "I am afraid you are not very comfortable," she added, as she saw Rideout's efforts to arrange himself gracefully on the extremely narrow stool. After all, it would have been better to have offered him the chair.

"Thank you," said Rideout, "I am quite comfortable; nothing could be better, I assure you."

But for all that, he made up his mind that he would have done more wisely to stand up. Now Adam, had he been in the same position, would not have paused to think of whether he were sitting or standing, which trifling matter marks the difference that existed between the two men.

"I never, never will forgive Prue," said Mignon, looking at Rideout, and thinking what a pity it was that his eyes were so blue, and his hair was so black.

"You are angry with her," he said, leaning forward; "you were disappointed that you got no reply to your letter from me?"

"I was more than disappointed," said Mignon; "I cried!"

"You did?" he said, drawing nearer still; "you cared for me so much as that?"

"If you had no one to speak to from week's end to week's end (except Prue), and nobody to write a letter to you, and

nobody (except one other person and Prue) to care two straws whether you were dead or alive, would not you be delighted, overjoyed, proud at discovering that somebody not only told somebody else he liked you very much indeed, but actually took the trouble to write and tell you so himself?"

"Then," said Rideout passionately, "I suppose anybody would have done as well—a travelling tinker, or the butcher's boy, or anything else that had eyes to see, heart to love, and fingers to write to you?"

"Well," said Mignon, considering, "so long as I did not see him, you know, and he spoke properly, and wrote me a good long letter every day, I don't suppose it would have signified very much. Of course I never expected that you and I would be talking to one another like this!"

"And I should never have written to you had I not been resolved on seeing you—ay, and more than once—so our letters were written with a difference. If it would not tax your memory too much, perhaps you will tell me what you said in your letter?"

"O yes," she answered, putting her hand to her head, "that is to say, if you will give me a little time for recollecting; you see it was so difficult, and it took such a very long time."

"And why was it such a difficult thing?" he said, gazing at her as though his eyes could never be sated with her dimpled, childish beauty.

"You see, I had never written one before," she said, looking rather ashamed of the confession. "Let me see—I began by saying that I was very sorry I nearly knocked you over

in the avenue, and that I would never do it again if I could possibly help it!"

"Yes," he said, smiling in spite of himself, "and what else?"

"That I was very much obliged to you for writing me a letter; and that I hoped you would send me another as soon as you possibly could, for it was so dreadfully dull here!"

"Yes!"

"And I hoped you would make the next a little longer!"

"Yes!"

"I think that's all. Oh! and my kind regards. I wanted to send my love, but Prue would not hear of it, and so——"

"Prue helped you to write that letter to me?" he cried.

"Of course she did," said Mignon. "I don't know how I should have got on without her; two heads are better than one, you know. So we did it together, and really, upon the whole, I think you would have liked it very much indeed!"

"No doubt," said Rideout; "nevertheless, upon the whole, I will confess that I no longer regret the loss of that letter—I no longer bear malice to the thief who stole it—he is welcome to it, he may keep it, I make him a present of it! In future I will get my man Coles to assist me with my letters to you; so long as I write the signature, it will not of course matter to you whether the handwriting is mine or his?"

"I should not mind it in the least," she said sincerely; "a letter is a letter, and if you told him what to say, it would be just as good as if you had written it yourself."

He stamped his foot upon the gravel in his impatience.

"Is she nothing but a little coquette after all?" he thought.

It flashed through his mind that her composure on receiving him was possibly mere skilful coquetry, and he thought he would have preferred her resenting his intrusion with indignation and scorn; for, man-like, he who profited by the indiscretion was the first to condemn it. Treachery of this kind, so common from man to woman, is rarely, if ever, displayed by woman to man.

With such ungenerous thoughts in his mind, he looked keenly at her as though he would discover if

> "In Cupid's college she had spent
> Sweet days, a lovely graduate, still unshent,
> And kept his rosy terms in idle languishment"—

but as he looked his suspicions died away. His experience of woman was wide and deep enough to have long ago taught him that there are two kinds of innocence—the one too absolutely ignorant of evil to fear any man living, with no thought of guarding itself against a danger it does not know to exist, being as much a part of the possessor as the air she breathes (and such innocence was Mignon's); the other, purity that is pure consciously, with a full knowledge of its own exceeding value—an innocence that is only compatible with the clearest possible knowledge of evil, and that enables woman to meet her natural enemy, man, at every point, armed.

Coming out of his brief reverie, Mr. Rideout discovered that Mignon had picked up a newspaper that lay on the ground by her side, and was actually reading it.

"You seem interested," he said, in a tone of pique, thereby revealing a most unheroic weakness in his character. No wise man, who wishes to establish his empire over a woman's heart, indulges in the luxury of pique; for, by so doing, he places himself at a disadvantage that she is not slow to perceive, and licenses her to smile with superior wisdom at his folly.

"I beg your pardon," said Mignon, putting her finger down on the paragraph, she was reading, "but I caught sight of such an odd pretty name; and Lu-Lu and I always look out for all the fine names we can find for the book we are writing."

"You are writing a book?" he said, smiling, in spite of his crossness. "And pray what is it to be about?"

"Love!" said Mignon gravely. "We were afraid we should make a terrible muddle of the love scenes, as neither of us had ever had a real lover; but now it will be all right. We shall put you in as the hero!"

"And my letters?" enquired Rideout.

"And my letters!" said Mignon; "we shall copy those right off—they will look so much more real!"

"If it will be any further satisfaction to you," he said sarcastically, "I will send my portrait to be used as a frontispiece. I don't make such a bad photograph, altogether."

"Do you not?" said Mignon, looking at him doubtfully, for somehow his good looks did not please her; and yet that dark, reckless face had been a fatal one to women.

"And this name that took your fancy so much?" he said.

"La Mert. I can't quite understand—it seems a trial of some sort——" She paused in amazement as he caught the

paper from her hand, and his face turned pale and angry. His eyes fell on the paragraph: it ran as follows:

"LA MERT *versus* LA MERT.—Public interest in this *cause celèbre* will receive a fresh stimulus next week when the case comes on for hearing, as it is rumoured that in the course of it many painful family disclosures will be made."

"Why do your people allow you to see such things as these?" he cried, striking the paper with his open hand. "Vile records of sin and shame, utterly unfit reading for a young and innocent girl. Did you understand it—do you know what it means, that paragraph?"

She looked at him in wonder, his excitement appeared to her so strange and unnatural . . . . what could she have said to so move him?

"No," she said, "I do not know what it means; but why should you mind if I did?"

"You have never seen or heard of that name before," he persisted, "either in a newspaper or otherwise?"

He awaited her reply with such eagerness, that one might have supposed his life depended upon it, and he drew a breath of relief as she answered, "Never!"

"Is it an omen?" he said to himself, crushing the paper between his restless hands. "Whether it be or no, I care not—I will not turn back; many a man goes through more than this to get his heart's desire . . . "

"Mignon," he said aloud, "do you know why I came here to see you to-day?"

"To ask me to write you another letter?"

"No," he said, "I did not come for that. Will you try and understand me, Mignon, when I tell you that I love you, love you with a passion that I have sought to overcome, and cannot, that if conquered one moment has vanquished me the next, and against which I have ceased to struggle, for it has become a part of myself. There are obstacles between us, dear angel, obstacles that (Good God!" he thought, "if she only knew what they are!) will be removed ere long, and they who stand between us shall pass away like shadows, the last, the best beloved among the rest, to return no more . . . . I swear it! . . ."

There was a wild and reckless defiance in his voice as he broke off that startled the girl. It was as though he defied Heaven itself to stand between them; and Rideout caught her surprise as quickly as it arose.

"Do not be afraid," he said, with extraordinary tenderness of look and tone; "to you I will be ever faithful and true, and neither grief, nor sorrow, nor shadow of sin or shame shall rest upon that lovely head. . . ."

He paused to watch the half smile that parted Mignon's exquisite lips (so may a child smile who is pleased with the sound of the words it hears, yet comprehends nothing of their meaning), lips that were the crowning beauty of her face, and flatly contradicted her eyes, cold, clear, and given to mirth and observation. When a woman's eyes and lips tell the same story, it is not difficult to decide what she will say or do at any given crisis of her life, and she will fulfil her fate with no more of effort than makes a fruit, when it

falls, ripened, to the earth; but when reason, calm and critical, dwells in the eyes, and from thence keeps its watch over the impulses of the heart as typified by the lips, may it be foretold that there will sooner or later be fought a determined battle between the opposing forces, and that upon its issue will depend the future of the woman's soul.

"Mignon," said Rideout impetuously, "does it seem a strange thing to you that I should love you as I do—without having exchanged a dozen words with you—knowing nothing of you but what your face tells?"

"Yes," she said promptly, "I do think it very odd—I told Prue so; just ask her if I did not say it was the kindest, the most outrageous, the most extraordinary thing I had ever heard in my life; and she could not account for it any more than I could!"

"And why should it be so kind and so extraordinary?" he said. "Has no one else ever fallen in love with you, Mignon?"

"No one," she said seriously. "What on earth should put such an idea into a person's head? And indeed I was very much obliged to you, as I told you in my letter; for I felt so lonely, and dull, and uncared for, just then. But now" (her face dimpled into sudden smiles) "I am afraid it is wickedly ungrateful of me, only I do not seem to care so much about it, and I do not think it would break my heart if you were never to write me another letter; for, to tell you a secret, somebody that I love beyond every one else in the world is coming to me—may come this minute even, or to-night, or to-morrow—and I shall be so perfectly

happy, that I shall forget all about everything, everything, but that we are together at last—that somebody and I . . ."

He caught her hand so fiercely that she recoiled from him; and Adam, seeing the gesture from afar off, rose, trembled, and knelt down again.

"And you told me that you had no lover!" cried Rideout furiously; "and all the time—all the time——" He stopped, almost choked by the violence of his emotion.

"A lover?" said Mignon, bewildered. "There is no lover; it is my sister."

"Your sister?" he cried. "Forgive me, Mignon . . . ."

He turned pale under the relief her words afforded him.

"Yes," she said, almost in a whisper, "my beautiful lost sister . . . . for whom I have waited such a long, long while; but I always knew she would come at last, and now she is coming. . . ."

In the course of Rideout's life, he saw this girl many times, and under many aspects—in the day of her greatest happiness, as in that of her deepest tribulation—but he never again saw the look upon her face that he at this moment beheld . . . . without one shadow to dim the brightness of her hope, or one past experience that could make her fearful of the future; with the priceless illusions of youth still hers.

In the days to come the look upon that joyous, childish face was to recur to him, to haunt him by its gladness, to follow him like a curse, to burn into his heart like fire, until he nearly went mad in remembering that if he had known—oh Heaven! if he had known—he might have fixed that joy

of hers in her heart for ever, and so kept his soul clean of blood-guiltiness, if not of sin.

"Mignon," he said, "I came to tell you to-day, among other things, that I am going away; though do not fear but that I shall return to you. Then—then—listen!" he went on earnestly; "it is now a month since I first saw you, and I have been going through as many antics as a schoolboy. I have astounded even myself at the depths of folly that I have sounded . . . . I have been compelled to acknowledge that what I have always derided as absurdity is a fact; in my own proper person and against my will I have proved it, Mignon. . . . Always remember in the days to come that, however madly I loved you, it was against my will, my conscience, my God, all——"

He suddenly ceased; the last words seemed to have escaped him involuntarily.

"I had heard," he went on, "of two people falling in love at first sight, before either knew the name of the other, before they had exchanged one syllable, before either even knew if the other were married or single . . . . twin souls created for each other, met at last . . . . I had heard of this, and of the shame and grief that ofttimes come after these sudden recognitions of kindred souls, since for one who finds his other self in time, there are nine hundred who meet too late! And as I have said, the theory merely amused me. I could understand a sudden admiration at first sight, but love I could not and did not understand until the day I saw you, and then and there, and in the

very midst of a ridiculous situation that filled you with no other sense than that of amusement, I loved you, but it was unconsciously; not until I had seen you many times, and learnt your face and manner by heart, did it suddenly dawn upon me that life would not be worth the living without you, and that win you I must and would, no matter what came between . . . . and I reckon myself a happy man in that I found you when I did, ere it was just too late. . . . Tell me," he cried ardently, "on that day did you feel yourself as irresistibly drawn to me as I did to you? Did you recognise me as your——"

"Oh!" said Mignon, taking her hand away, and placing it with its fellow over a face that had grown most suspiciously red, "I beg your pardon for interrupting you—I do indeed; and don't think me very rude, but—but I think we were drawn together with a vengeance! I never shall forget the bump I gave you as long as I live!"

And here she gave up the attempt to retain her gravity, and laughed so heartily as (by some process of reasoning best known to himself) to restore Adam to perfect equanimity.

"You did look so cross when we came round that tree," said Mignon: "and as to your hat, I always thought it a mercy that neither of us stepped on it."

Rideout, who was absolutely without the kind of humour that enables a man to smile at his own expense—he therefore missed one of the keenest pleasures that poor mortal beings possess—looked at Mignon as though he found her impulse of mirth exceedingly foolish and ill-timed.

Here was this girl, he said to himself, for whom he was sinning past redemption, so indifferent to his passion, that she could find in it merely an occasion of silly laughter. Why should he love her? Why could he not free himself from this charm, this infatuation?

"Mignon," he said sternly, "you do not seem to understand—you think all this a joke, and that there is no earnest in it, but you will find out your mistake when I come back and fetch you away to make you my wife."

"Your wife?" said Mignon, with a saucy smile, that brought to life two delicious dimples in her delicate cheeks. "You are not—you cannot be—so mad as to suppose I am going to be that? Do you know how old I am?" she added, looking at him seriously, and pushing one of her little hands through her hair; "sixteen and a week, and very little indeed for my age! Now, in four or five years' time, perhaps, I might think of marrying, if she did not mind, and would let us both live with her, but not now! Why, it would be like playing at being married!"

"Come and play at it, then," said Rideout just as seriously as she, "it will seem more in earnest after a bit."

"No, no!" she said, "you may fancy yourself in love with me, but no amount of the hardest fancying on earth would make me think myself in love with you!"

"Am I such an ugly devil that I frighten you?" he cried passionately.

"No," she said, surveying him critically, "I should say you were very good-looking to a person who admired dark people. And though you are very nice and kind when you

are not in a rage, I think if ever I do marry, I should like a peaceable sort of a man, who did not worry me, though I should expect him to say, at least twice every day, 'Mignon, I love you.'"

"I will not worry you," he said, divided between anger and laughter, "and I will tell you that every day, never fear, and in time you will learn to love me, little Mignon."

"To love?" she said dreamily, "do you know what it is to love? To long for some one all and every day, to think of nothing else upon earth, to weary after her, to feel that until you get to that person you only live one half, and that the worst half of your life. That is love. How would it be possible to love a man like that?"

"Some day you will do so," he said, leaning towards her with an air of pleading entreaty,—"some day . . . . little sweetheart. . . ."

She had turned her head partly aside, and was looking down on her roses. A sweet musing look was in her dewy eyes, and on her rosebud mouth.

"Mignon," he went on, "I want you to listen to me, and to try and understand me if you can. . . . You do not love me now; it is not possible that you should do so (for although you seem most familiar to me since I have watched and followed you so long, yet I have been to you no more than any one of the idle, impertinent young men who have stared at you in church and out walking), but you will be no such inapt pupil, my flower, and whether you love me or no, you shall be no man's wife but mine—I swear it! And if by any cheat or fraud any man come between us, I will wrest

you from him, ay; and keep you, for to no other man can you be what you are to me, and if by any misfortune I lost you, I would search the world through and through until I had found you, so do not dream that you will escape or elude me, Mignon, for you will not. In about a fortnight—you may look for me at any moment after the fourteenth day has passed—I shall return, I shall walk straight to this garden, and probably I shall find you sitting here on this old chair, and maybe you will wear a white gown and a red rose at your breast, just as you wear them to-day, and you will look as little, and childish, and lovely as you do to-day, and I shall say to you, 'Mignon, I have come to ask you to be my wife,' and you will put your little hand in mine. . . . It is possible that people will tell you stories about me, but you will not believe them, my little one; you will just say to yourself, 'He is coming back in fourteen days to marry me, and he loves me dearly, dearly!' and so you need not mind the stories. And do not let any one fall in love with you, do not dare. . . ."

His blue eyes had so fierce a menace in them, that they appeared almost black for the moment; then, as they dwelt on Mignon's dimpled, charming face, he smiled . . . . and so, with a last long look, and a close, strong hand-clasp, he was gone.

CHAPTER XI.

"He ne'er is crowned
With immortality who fears to follow
Where airy voices lead."

SILENCE in the garden for the space of a full minute. Even the scraping of Adam's knife ceased, as, turning half round, he leaned his hand upon the gravel, and looked across at the girl's downcast face and lips pursed into a pout.

As she glanced towards him, meeting his eyes, for he could not instantly withdraw them, an idea came into her head, and jumping up she crossed the garden and came to his side.

"Adam," she said seriously, "would you mind telling me —as you have got a sweetheart of your own, and of course know something about such matters—whether you ever heard of a person being married straight off against her will, whether she would or no?"

"Such things used to be, miss," he said, "but nowadays it's not often heard of."

"Then," said Mignon, "you would say that if a person were threatened with such a thing she need not be very uneasy—he could not make her say 'yes'?"

"No," said Adam, "but she might change her mind, or he might coax her into saying it—you're quite sure it would be against her will?"

His keen eyes studied every line of her face as he spoke.

"Quite sure!" said Mignon emphatically. "You see, Adam, a love-letter is a perfectly charming thing, and to

know that somebody is in love with a person is more charming still, but what on earth would one do with a husband?"

"What indeed?" said Adam, his heart as light as a feather, "if she is quite sure."

"She is quite sure," said Mignon, nodding, "and I am very much obliged to you, Adam. I should not have had to ask, if Prue had got a sweetheart, and knew more about such matters—only, you see, she used to have one, but has not now, poor thing!"

Then she smelled her roses, appeared to forget all about Adam, stood still for some moments, thinking, moved slowly away, and presently left the garden.

He went quietly on with his weeding for a quarter of an hour, twenty minutes, thirty, then made up his mind that she was not coming out again until the evening, and prepared for departure. He collected the weeds into a respectable heap, rose, picked up his mat, and was turning towards the ladder, when the sound of approaching footsteps set his heart beating, and turned his head in the direction of the garden-door. A smile came over his face as he discovered not Mignon, but Prue.

"And now," said he to himself, "the deluge!"

He wore no hat, his face was clear as the day before her eyes, the recognition was, on both sides, perfect.

"You villain!" she cried, "what have you done with that letter you stole?"

He touched his breast. "I have it here," he said.

She looked down at the knife and mat he held in his hands, at his unmistakable gardener's dress, at his shirt-

sleeves and bare head, then—"Good Lord!" she cried, drawing the deepest breath she ever drew in her life, "and I took you—I actually took you that night for a—gentleman!"

"And why did you?" he said. "I don't remember telling you anything about my station in life. I told you I was an honest man—which I am."

"An honest man!" retorted Prue, with intense scorn, "you have the impudence to call yourself that? And pray what have my young lady done to you, that you should take such a powerful interest in her as to steal her letters?"

"The question is a bold one," said Adam, "and one that I don't choose to answer to any one but—herself."

"You'll have the face to tell her what you've done?" said Prue, staggered by his assurance.

"Yes, I shall tell her."

"No wonder you disappeared so quick that day at Madam Tussore's," she said. "No wonder I'd scarcely got sight of my young lady than you bolted——"

She paused, for the first time remembering that this man, no matter what his previous misdeeds might be, had saved her young mistress's life at the peril of his own.

But as she looked at him, cool, confident, fearless, her anger rose again, and burned hotly in her breast.

"And if you're going to tell her," she said, "why didn't you do it before. You've had opportunities enough while you've been sneaking about her garden, goodness knows!"

"I did not intend to tell her that until I thought it time to tell her—other things."

"Do you know what you are talking about," cried Prue,

in a fury, "that you speak of telling her this and that, as though she was a cook or a housemaid—one of your own class—do you know who she is, I say?"

"A young woman," said Adam, his face softening, "and a good one, too—God bless her!"

Prue's anger suddenly left her, it was too useless to be retained, and she looked at the young man with a sensation of despair. As yet not the dimmest suspicion of the height to which his audacious hopes aspired had dawned upon her.

"'Tis a true saying that ill-doings never prosper," said Prue, "and I'm sure your's didn't. You stole the letter and made a thief of yourself—for nothing. You tried to keep Mr. Rideout and my young lady apart—well, he's mad in love with her, and ready to marry her whenever she pleases. There!"

"Yes," said Adam, "I know it. He was here this afternoon."

"Here," cried Prue, starting back, "here, did you say?"

"Yes, why not? Has she not told you?"

"I've not seen her. He's a bold one," she added, "to cut in like that the very first time I turned my back!"

"But I don't think your mistress will marry Mr. Rideout," said Adam.

"And why not?" said Prue tartly, "unless you're going to take upon yourself to forbid the banns!"

"There are one or two objections," said Adam calmly, "or at least—I think so."

"And what may they be!" cried Prue, angry and inquisitive; "maybe you think she's over young for marrying?"

"No," he said, "I should not consider that an objection. Plenty of girls marry as young as she."

"Or he's poor?"

"He is very rich—as riches go."

"Maybe he's not his own master?"

"He has no parents, and is absolutely his own master."

"Then," said Prue, "if he is rich, and his own master, and so deep in love with her, and if she favours him, whatever on earth can there be to keep them apart?"

"Two things," said Adam. "In the first place, Mr. Rideout is married already; and in the second, I mean to marry her myself."

CHAPTER XII.

"Ha! ha! the wooing o't!"

WAS that Mignon who sat so quiet on the old wooden chair, the neglected "Goblins" by her side, her untouched work stretched in a forlorn strip at her feet?

Some one who watched her said to himself that she looked as though a blight had fallen upon her, and he shook his head so sadly that the wallflowers trembled and shook also.

Such a merry little soul as she used to be, he said to himself; such a joyous, happy, bewitching little maiden!

What could he do to amuse her? To go over, he was forbidden, to speak to her even he dared not, but no one could

prevent him from looking, and he had made no promises about messages without words. A thought struck him!

He rapidly descended his ladder, disappeared, presently became visible again, bearing a small basket lined with leaves, and apparently filled with something delectable. He attached to this basket two stout cords of considerable length, then mounted the ladder, carefully placed the basket on the top of the wall, adjusted the cords, and proceeded to lower it gently into the garden beneath, so gently as not to disturb its contents, and so noiselessly that not until they were almost on a level with Mignon's head did she discover them.

Cherries! round, shining, rosy, red! As she looked at them her eyes brightened, she could almost feel her teeth meeting in their soft, luscious, plump sides . . . but were they for her?

All at once she burst into a peal of laughter, and clapped her hands.

"Adam!" she said, "why of course it's Adam!" but on directing her glance upwards, she found no Adam, only a group of wallflowers.

Her eyes reverted to the basket. It had paused in its descent to a convenient distance from her hand, and now gave a gentle bob or two of invitation, as much as to say, "Come, come, you are very backward; why don't you eat me?"

She could resist the temptation no longer, but put out a little eager curved hand. It is only the first step that costs, the rest is easy enough; in two minutes the basket was empty!

In two more minutes it had whisked itself out of sight

in an ecstacy of bobs that suggested "Good-bye, and thank you!"

Mignon sat quite still, surrounded by cherry stones, her blue eyes gradually travelling upwards after the basket; then she sighed, looked at her cherry-stained fingers, shook her head, blushed. "I am a greedy little pig," she said, "but oh! how I wish it had all to come over again!"

She curled her two red lips, the one over the other, as though she tasted those cherries still, then looked about for the ladder, that she might by means of it convey her gratitude to the young gardener; but alas! it was nowhere to be found.

"Flowerpots are no good," she said, gravely; "they always give way under one; besides, one would want dozens. I'll thank him for them to-morrow!"

Then she sighed and went away; but to-morrow came, and yet another morrow, and Mignon was not found in her old place; and Adam, watching all day long for her, fell to asking himself, had Prue, with all the incapacity of a woman for keeping a secret, told her young mistress everything, and was she too proud and angry to walk in the garden, where she might be subjected to the chance of his appearance? When the third day came, and brought no Mignon, Adam made up his mind that Prue had betrayed him, and prepared himself for as disagreeable a duty and scene, as a man and a lover with any pride and self-respect ever undertook.

CHAPTER XIII.

"I loved her to the very white of truth
And she would not conceive it."

LEANING her brow against the window-pane in the bare and deserted school-room, Mignon kept her watch for Muriel, longing to see the well-known slender figure turn in at the garden gate, to hear the hurrying feet upon the gravel walk, and the loving eager cry of "Gabrielle! Gabrielle!" Three days had gone by since Mignon had paid that visit to Madame Tussaud's, that was fated to end in so strange a fashion; three days . . . only three, no more than an hour to untroubled happy people, yet a long, long while to this girl, who had for the first time tasted the exceeding bitterness of hope deferred which "maketh the heart sick."

The silence of her sister for the past year and a half had been hard to bear, but the treasure and reward lying in the future had been anticipated with such entire trust, that though in the earlier portion of that time she had suffered keenly, yet she had never endured the misery of doubt or despair. But now, now that she knew Muriel to be close at hand, divided from her merely by a few houses, and fields, and roads, and conscious (as she must be) of how anxiously the little sister was watching for her coming, yet making no sign, now upon Mignon's loving and faithful heart fell the cold and cruel blight of neglect. Neglect, more pitiless than jealousy, more inhuman than hatred, that closes about the heart with a numbing embrace that slowly destroys all energy, hope, and gladness.

To sorrow for misfortune's sake is natural and healthy, to receive unkindness from the world is easy and light, but neglect at the hand of one from whom love alone is due (else should we not mourn its withdrawal so deeply) is a violation of the laws of human nature. And this thing, that uses no harsh words, and is liable to no such punishment as is meted out to overt forms of cruelty, is yet the most dastardly and barbarous of all the weapons wherewith we have power to stab the hearts of those who love us. Shadows were beginning to creep about the girl's young life—to creep higher and higher, till they rested upon her heart, as she watched from day to day, and hour to hour, for one who never came.

Some one came from behind her, and took one of the soft girlish hands between two hard rough ones. It was Prue.

"Miss Mignon, dear heart," she said, "won't you come out for a bit this afternoon, even if 'tis only so far as the garden? You've not crossed the threshold these three days, and you used to pretty nigh live in the open air! And if she should come"—the woman hesitated and turned aside—"couldn't I fetch you in less than a minute?"

"And what would she say," cried the girl, "if I were not here to run out to the door and welcome her? She would think that I was angry with her, that I had grown careless of her"—she paused, and put both her hands suddenly to her side. "Such a pain, Prue!" she said, "oh! such a pain! Such a feeling that everything is going wrong with me, and that I don't know how to put it right again! If I had not

seen her, if I did not know that she was alive and well, I should think that it meant that she was dead!"

"No, no, miss," said Prue gently, "not dead—forgetful maybe, but not dead. Don't ever think of such a thing; why should you fret yourself so sore for one as never seems to fret herself about you?"

"You do not understand," said Mignon coldly and proudly, and she turned without another word, and went quietly away.

She paused a moment upon the threshold of the house-door, for her eyes were dazzled by the sun, and the vivid green of the trees and bushes smote her almost painfully after the subdued light within doors; then she descended the steps and went soberly enough into the garden. It seemed to her a long while since she had walked in it, and that a great deal had happened to her in that time, although in truth nothing new had come to her, save the sharpness of a disappointment, that to her undisciplined heart had the force of a revelation, and the cruelty of an injustice.

She sat down in the old place and picked up her needle-work, which lay just where she had left it, and was in no way improved by the night dews and noonday sun. There had not been a drop of rain, so the needle was still unrusted; a thimble lay in her pocket, she drew it out and commenced working. The unquiet mind is an excellent incentive to manual labour: she had never before worked so steadily and industriously as she did now. Somebody came through the door communicating with the other garden and advanced towards her, but she did not lift her eyes; she believed it to be

Prue, and she was angry with the woman, and did not desire her society. But when the steps paused before her, she looked up, and saw Adam the gardener.

"Is that you, Adam?" she said, surprised that he should have come by way of the garden instead of the wall, "and have you come to do some weeding for me to-day?"

"No," he answered, "not to-day."

Something in his voice made Mignon glance at him in surprise. Was this Adam, this man with boldly-lifted brows and fearless look, as of equal meeting equal, yet with some feeling stronger and deeper than pride subduing and softening his features to a nobility that she had never seen them wear before?

Scarcely noting his expression, she became cognisant of an indefinable yet certain change in his manner. Mignon possessed the sweet and gentle courtesy that is inbred in some men and women, and she put it forth as naturally to the poor as to the rich; but at the first suspicion of an encroachment, by either look or word, the proud Ferrers blood showed itself, and her tone instantly defined his position as gardener, hers as gentlewoman, as she said:

"You wish then to speak to me?"

"I have something of yours in my possession that I wish to restore to you," he said, and drew from his pocket a letter sealed with red wax.

She took it from his hand and read aloud:

"PHILIP RIDEOUT, ESQ.,
"Lilytown."

The handwriting was her own. The matter of the lost letter had concerned her but little, nay, in the trouble of the last few days, she had forgotten its very existence, and the time of her writing it seemed a long, long while ago.

"How did you come by this?" she asked, wondering; "where on earth did you find it?"

"I stole it from Mr. Rideout," said Adam.

"You stole it!" she said, staring at him in utter bewilderment, "and why did you do that?"

He made no reply, only bent his eyes downwards, and waited quietly for her next words.

She passed her hand hastily over her brow, looked at the letter, looked back again at him; then the indifference, or, as it seemed to her, the effrontery, of his bearing angered her.

"And so you were a thief all the while, she said slowly, "and I thought you were an honest man! Who gave you the right to meddle in my affairs? What was it to you whether I wrote to Mr. Rideout or no? Did Miss Sorel set you over me as a spy and a keeper when she went away?"

No answer.

"So that was why you came into the garden that morning?" she cried, roused more and more by his apathy, and with all her other troubles swept clean away in the excitement of the moment.

"I saw you peeping into my book and fingering my thimble; were you trying to find a clue to my other doings? Were you trying to pick up something to my discredit?"

No answer.

"I have only one more question to ask you," she went on; "why did you not read my letter while you were about it—why do you return it to me with the seal unbroken?"

Still no reply, not a tremor of the eyelids, not a quiver of the firm lips, to show that her barbed words struck home, and wounded him to the quick.

"And if you thought to do harm by stealing that letter," she said, with a triumphant ring in her voice that dashed out the scorn, "you did not—it made no difference to Mr. Rideout, he came and told me all about it! But you know that already—you were in the garden spying when he came, though surely you made a terrible mistake in being out of earshot! You might have come as near as you pleased, and it would never have occurred to me that you were listening—for, you see, I did not know you were a spy. And now I understand why I caught you staring so at me when he went away. . . . Tell me!" she cried, "if you are man enough to speak the truth, who set you to watch me, to lie in wait for my letters, to come into my garden on false pretences, to lead me on to talk to you trustfully as I should to Prue? Was it—though I cannot believe it—Miss Sorel?"

"No," he said, "it was not Miss Sorel."

"You did it simply and solely of your own accord?"

"Simply and solely of my own accord!"

"I have no more to say to you," she said, "except that I am sorry—very sorry—that I have found you out to be so bad."

Her eyes were wistful, her face was pale . . . . following

upon the broken promise of the past three days, came this new disappointment, for she had liked and instinctively trusted this man, and she was, as she had said, sorry.

His heart ached as he looked at her, and to himself he said that his punishment was beginning . . . .

"And now," he said aloud, "you will listen to me. Had you not better sit down? you will be tired."

She looked at him, hesitated, then sat down again, obeying the law that impels the strong will to yield to the stronger —a submission that has in it all the elements of rebellion, and is as little grateful to the recipient as it is hateful to the giver.

"You have called me thief, eavesdropper, and spy," he said, "and each of these appellations is justly bestowed upon me, but you have not yet discovered the full extent of the fraud I have practised upon you. Can you guess what that is?"

She looked at him, measuring him from head to foot, his common dress, proud look, his well-shaped feet and hands, and all at once something flashed upon her that she had been blind indeed not to have discovered long ago, and catching that sudden light in her eyes, Adam knew that she had guessed the truth.

"You are not a gardener after all," she said, "you are a gentleman! And you came into my garden pretending to be what you are not?" she said slowly. "You obtained a footing in it by a lie, and kept it by hundreds of others?"

"Yes," he said, but now a red flush had crept slowly up to his brow and settled there.

"You let me order you about as though you were a servant, and laughed at me in your sleeve, while you weed the gravel walks?"

"I let you order me about, but I did not laugh at you . my sleeve."

"I gave you half-a-crown!"

"Yes."

"And you called me miss."

"I did."

"And I recommended you to study English history!"

"Yes."

"And you sent me cherries over the wall, and I ate them —everyone!"

"Yes!"

"Oh!" cried the girl, starting up and covering her scarlet cheeks with both hands, "I shall never get over it —I shall die of shame, and oh! sir, how I scorn, how I detest you!"

"Mignon," cried the young man in his excitement, and so shaken was she by the emotion that swayed her, that she never observed the slip, "I have told you the end of the story—the beginning you have yet to learn—my actions you know, but the motives that prompted them you do not——"

"Nor do I wish to hear them," cried the girl; "your actions are enough, and more than enough for me! Did you think because I was a poor friendless schoolgirl, with no father or mother, or brother—nobody to stand up for me—that you could play off as many practical jokes upon me as you pleased?"

"Mignon," cried Adam in despair, "can't you unde stand why I have done all this? do you not see how I ha tried to be your friend all along, even if I did make terrible mistake at the beginning?"

She did not reply, she was weeping; a great many caus had conspired to make her tears overflow; but Ada (being ignorant of the pressure of other troubles up her) took them to be altogether due to his own l behaviour.

"Mignon," he cried, distracted by the sight of [illegible] "won't you try to overlook the past—won't you [illegible] over again, on a better, surer foundation, won't you give [illegible] at least the chance of earning your good opinion?"

"How could I trust you again," she [illegible] hands away from her face. "How could I know wh [illegible] were telling me truth, and when [illegible] . . . and you saved my life," she [illegible] er forget that——"

will soften your anger to me," he [illegible] forget all the rest [illegible] e, or that I shall [illegible] your garden with [illegible] dred miles away. I will [illegible] me. If you should [illegible] e; a man may be [illegible] liar, thief, spy, [illegible] to you on the [illegible] our careful [illegible] rgive me, will you [illegible]

only one, and you will make the most miserable man upon earth the happiest . . . ."

Then, as she made no sign, he went slowly away, and left her standing there alone

CHAPTER XIV.

"Let the white death sit on thy cheek for ever,
We'll ne'er come there again."

"PRUE," said Mignon, sitting down unexpectedly on the floor, "I will never believe in anybody living again (except Muriel); and if you were to take it into your head to kill me one night in my sleep, I should not be in the least astonished; indeed, I should say it was exactly what I had expected!"

"I don't s'pose you'd say anything at all in that case, Miss Mignon," said Prue, who was giving the drawing-room a thorough good dusting in anticipation of Miss Sorel's return.

"I am a very little more than sixteen years old," said Mignon, addressing a bunch of flowers painted by her own hand, and duly framed and hung up on the opposite wall, and of which the roses were so deeply red, the violets so intensely blue, and the leaves so overpoweringly green, that they made the eyes wink again to look at them; "and I think the world a shockingly wicked, deceitful, surprising place, and human nature as bad as bad can be. Now what

should you suppose will be my opinion by the time I am sixty?"

"A deal more favourable to human natur'," said Prue, "When people get a better knowledge of theirselves, miss (and years give 'em that), they discover so much wickedness in theirselves, that they're in no hurry to cast stones at their neighbours. 'Tis only the young, miss, as comes to conclusions so mighty quick, and finds hard words so much easier to their tongues than kind ones."

"But surely," cried Mignon, pushing back her hair, "downright wicked things, like deceit, lies, and worse, require hard language? Can being old turn black things into white? Do old people have an upside-down dictionary, and call virtue vice, and vice virtue?"

"No, Miss Mignon, but they go deeper than just outsides —they see reasons."

"Would any amount of reasons make it right for you to deceive me as you did about that letter, Prue? Would an old person find a satisfactory reason why Mr. Rideout should ask me to marry him, when he had a wife all the time, and his name was not Rideout at all?"

"No," said Prue, "I've got no reasons for him—he's a rascal—and I should like" (making a movement of her hand that in a man would have taken the form of a doubled-up fist) "to tell him so to his face."

"I can't say I'm very sorry at his bad behaviour," said Mignon, sighing; "for I have been racking my brains as to what good excuse I should give him when he came back for not marrying him, for he is such a tremendous per-

son that it would not be easy to say 'No' to him; but now I shall just be able to drop him a curtsey, and say, 'Thank you very much, but does the English law permit a person to have two wives?"

"Villain!" cried Prue, "and what a silly believing woman was I, good Lord!"

"Perhaps it is not true, after all," said Mignon. "How are we to know that Adam was not telling us some more stories? Though why it should matter to him whether Mr. Rideout is married or single, or what on earth could have induced him to steal that letter, is more than I can understand! Do you think it is possible that he is a kleptomaniac, Prue?"

"What's that, miss?"

"A man who appropriates other people's goods: if he is rich, and in no want of the things he takes, he is called a kleptomaniac; but if he is a poor, despairing man, with a starving wife and family at home, he is called—a thief."

"No, miss," said Prue, frowning; "he's not that. It wasn't stealing neither, for he give it back to you; and when he took it, 'twas for your good."

"But why concern himself about my good?" said Mignon, looking puzzled. "What could it matter to him whether I wrote to Mr. Rideout or no?"

"Because," said the woman, "he knew you had no relations, nobody to look after you but a silly creature called Prue—and that Mr. Rideout was a bad man, not fit for a young lady to be writing to, and so he took the letter."

"You seem to have a very good opinion of him," said

Mignon, "though I'm sure I can't see what he has done to deserve it! The only difference between them that I can see is, that one came in at the garden door and made unlawful love, and the other came over the garden wall and played the spy—and really I don't think there is a pin to choose between them! Though after all," she added, "what does it matter how they behave, what does anything matter, so long as she still delays to come, and when she must know, too, how I am wearying for her?"

Rat-tat! went the knocker of the hall-door, as though in answer to Mignon's words, causing her to start violently.

"A letter from Muriel!" She sprang to her feet, and in a moment she had flung the house-door wide, to discover a boy on the step who handed a yellow envelope to her with the customary inquiry of "Any answer?"

She did not hear him . . . . she was looking at the ugly narrow envelope with the most intense joy; it was from Muriel, she was sure of that, to say she was coming immediately . . . . and yet her fingers tarried, and were not able to open it.

Prue came out. The boy went away. Mignon desperately tore the envelope asunder, and read aloud the following words:

From	To
M. GIRARDIN,	Miss GABRIELLE FERRERS,
Hôtel de B——,	Rosemary,
Paris.	Lilytown.

"An Englishwoman, named Sorel, died here suddenly last night. By examination of papers have discovered above

address. Some relative must come over at once to identify body and arrange for burial."

The telegram fell from Mignon's hands. The shock, following on her triumphant and mistaken gladness, was cruel. . . . . She looked at Prue, who did not utter a syllable. The cook appeared in the hall, attracted thither by the instinct that invariably draws people to the scene of a catastrophe, or the place where one is being announced.

"Mistress is dead!" said Prue, and threw her apron over her head.

"Dead!" said the cook, looking shocked, but putting on the pleasurable air of excitement that domestic misfortune ever seems to afford the ordinary unattached servant, to whom a death or a wedding is equally productive of fuss and importance, agreeably combined with disregard of the every day duties that it has been her custom to fulfil. Mignon did not weep . . . . there was a strange tightness about her heart, and she felt stunned by a blow. She had given the dead woman respect, not love, yet respect is as good a thing as love in its way, and Miss Sorel had been her only friend, save Prue, for four long years . . . . it cost her now a bitter pang to remember how often lately she had uttered her name carelessly, ignorantly speaking lightly of that home-coming that was never to be, ... at the very time, perhaps, when she had been passing away to that world of mystery that mortal eye hath never seen.

"The telegram said that somebody must go," said Prue,

taking her apron from her eyes. "Oh! poor mistress .... poor mistress .... nobody ever came to see her but her brother, and he lives somewhere in the north; did she ever tell you his address, Miss Mignon?"

"Never," said the girl, and she shivered, as she recalled the sinister-faced man who had looked at her so strangely, and spoken to her so roughly, on the sole occasion when she had found herself in his presence.

"If the address is anywhere, 'twill be in the big writing-table in her room," said Prue, lowering her voice involuntarily as she uttered the pronoun that now stood for what was not.

"We will go and see," said Mignon, who felt as one who moves in a dream.

They went upstairs, and into the pretty sunny chamber that would receive its mistress no more; treading softly, as though she were by to hear them, and looking about with the awe that ever attends the dwelling-places of those who were once with us, but are now apart.

The table was securely locked, and would yield to no key that the house afforded; finally, and with a roughness that made Mignon turn her head, half expecting to see the tall slender shape and the grey gown of the woman whose secrets were so rudely violated, the desk was forced open, and its orderly contents disclosed. Neatly labelled packets of bills, school and tradesmen's books, all the tidy memoranda of a careful manager and a prim old maid were there, and Prue, who had seen all many times before, felt her eyes fill again.

The search was not a long one. Two or three slender packets of letters, indorsed "Silas Sorel to Marie Sorel," were placed in such fashion, that the most casual glance could not fail to fall upon them. Mignon drew out one of the sheets, and, turning to the heading, read:

"The How, Northallerton, Yorkshire."

As she laid the letter down again, she perceived a packet addressed to herself, and indorsed, "Not to be opened until after my death."

She took it in her hand, and again, burning summer day though it was, she shivered, and her face was very pale as she said to Prue—

"See, this is addressed to me. It is no harm to take what is my own?"

"It is yours," said Prue, sobbing, "since she is dead. Poor soul! poor soul!"

Five minutes later Mignon was sitting in her chamber alone, the unopened letter in her hand.

CHAPTER XV.

"I am for the house with the narrow gate, which I take to be too little for pomp to enter; some that humble themselves may, but the many will be too chill and tender: and they'll be for the flow'ry way that leads to the broad gate and the great fire."

MIGNON broke the seal, and took out two enclosures, the one a long and closely-written letter, the other a sealed

envelope, also addressed to herself, the superscription of which was as follows:

"Not to be opened until the other letter has been read."

The habit of obedience was still strong upon Mignon; she laid the second enclosure down on her lap and took up the first. It ran thus:

"In the event of my sudden decease, I write these words for your enlightenment and guidance, my poor little Mignon, since, when I am gone, there will not be in the whole world a more lonely, friendless creature than yourself. For my own sake I do not fear Death; but my heart aches when I think of you, whom I must needs leave desolate and unprovided for, and for your sake I would live yet a few years longer, until I had seen you placed securely beyond the storms and temptations of life. Then I could face your father without fear in the other world, where he awaits me, and say to him, 'I have left her safe, the little daughter that you entrusted to my care . . . .' It may be that you will never read these lines; that I shall tell you my story some night when the darkness hides from me your face—the face that is a birthright from your dead father. But I think not; I think you will have to learn the truth from what is written here.

"Thirty years ago I was but a very little older than you now are, and happy; for I was betrothed to your father, and we were but a month from our wedding-day. Another

woman came between me and my happiness present and to come. It is not for me to say harsh things of your mother to you, poor child, and therefore I shall say only that she was beautiful, and that she tempted him from his allegiance to me; from his faith to me, but never from his faith in me. He knew well that I loved him only, and for ever, and the last letter his poor stiffening fingers penned was to me, the last name he uttered, when he was dying, was 'Marie! Marie!' not his dead wife's name, only his poor lost sweetheart's. I received and read his letter; I have it still, it has lain ever since on my breast by night and day, it will go with me to my coffin; and in this letter he prayed me, for the sake of the love I had once borne him, to befriend his little daughter when he was gone. He was a ruined man then, his splendid fortune had been squandered in mad extravagance, he knew of no one to whom he could make such a request but me. Muriel was old enough to earn her bread, but you were only a child: and having made his prayer to me, he died, and I did not shed one tear for him, for he seemed nearer to me dead than he had for long years been to me living. They sent me his letter; the first that had come to me since those he wrote to me as his betrothed bride, and I resolved at once that I would be worthy of the trust that had survived his love.

I went to my brother and told him what I was about to do. He had always hated your father, with a hatred that nothing could exceed, and on hearing that I meant to adopt his youngest daughter, he swore that if I took you under my care I should never enter his doors again. When I

told him my mind was made up, he bade me begone starve with you—ay, starve; for all the fortune I posse was a scanty pittance left me by my mother—or s seemed to one who had never known the use of mc or the lack of it.

"I left him and came to London, and then my strug began. It is difficult for a woman to obtain a subsiste even if she possesses the knowledge necessary to earn i is more difficult still when she knows not how to seek it, has no friends to advise her; nevertheless, ere many mo were past I was able to take you to a home—to which came with grief and unwillingness, for though you had both your parents, yet the first real trial of your life your separation from Muriel, and though I besought he to come and live with me, she would not do so; she r make her own way in the world, she said, but would ask leave to come and see you twice a year.

"I made her promise that she would never tell you you were indebted to me for a home; I thought the kn ledge might fetter and gall you, so you were left to bel that your father left you in my charge, with a sum of mc for your maintenance.

"And now, Mignon, the bitter part of my story is to cc and how hard it is to me to tell, you will never know;— this: at my death the small income that I possess passes my brother's hands, and you will be totally unprovided If I could have left you some certain yearly sum, now small, I should die content; but it grieves me sorely to l you without one creature to whom you can look for prc

tion or help, save Prue, who loves you, and is a good woman, yet has it not in her power to do more than serve you faithfully. By patient care, I have succeeded in saving for you one hundred pounds, which I have paid in at the Lilytown bank, in your real name, Gabrielle Ferrers—that name you must almost have forgotten, it is so long since any one has called you by it.

"And now for the future. If I do not return, and since I know my brother too well to believe that he will hold out any hand of help towards you, your best plan will be to seek employment as governess or companion, with Prue's aid. I have already spoken to her on the subject, and the money I have left you will pay both her expenses and yours until such time as you have found a shelter. Trusting in God and your own heart, in the integrity of your principles, in the purity of your soul, all may yet be well with you; and if it should be that the love of a good man become yours, I beseech you do not cast it aside for any fancy, or whim, or folly. And I warn you against believing the passionate vehement wooer, who vows the world to be well lost for your sake, rather than the true and steady one, who does his duty before Heaven and his own conscience, and whose love for you is no sudden caprice born of your beauty, but a deep and steady affection that will wax deeper, not colder, as time goes by.

"You will perhaps lay down my letter here to say to yourself, 'Have I not Muriel? Can I be so friendless, when the thing I love best on earth is alive and well?' I have received news of your sister Muriel."

Mignon sprang up.

"Oh! how cruel . . . how cruel!" she cried wil
"never to say one word to me, and when I used to ask
every day. . . ." She broke off suddenly, remembering t
she was speaking of the dead; and is there any more sha
ful disloyalty on earth than to have unkind thoughts
words for those who can say nothing to reinstate themsel
in our regard?

She was so blinded by excitement and eagerness, that
written words danced before her eyes; by-and-by, th
steadied themselves, and she read as follows:

"If I return, as some strange yet certain instinct to-ni
tells me that I shall not return, this letter with its enclos
will be destroyed, and of your sister you will learn no tidi
from me, until she tells you all, of her own free will; I
since it is possible that the knowledge I possess may
forced upon you in some unforeseen and abrupt mann
and that the telling of the story may come more gen
from my lips than from those of a stranger, I leave
written account of my interview with her, although I
bound to tell you that if you read it, you do so in defia
of her express wish. You worship Muriel; to you she i
type of perfect purity and goodness; you could bet
believe evil of yourself than of her. I would that you mi
keep your belief in Muriel always, that in your thoughts s
should be ever as she is to-day, therefore I leave it to yours
whether you will destroy, unread, the letter I enclose in th
or read it. I am sorely perplexed between my promise

her and my duty to you. Farewell. God bless and protect you always.

"MARIE MAKEPEACE SOREL."

CHAPTER XVI.

"Anything that's mended is but patched; virtue that transgresses is but patched with sin, and sin that amends is but patched with virtue."

MIGNON walked to the window and looked out at the garden stretched below. Bumble with a favourite wife had escaped from the kitchen-garden, and were strutting about the burnt-up, stubbly bit of lawn on which reposed half a dozen bent croquet hoops, three or four battered wooden balls, and two mallets, forming the forlorn residue of a set of croquet that had been in its prime some three years ago.

"It will rain before night," she said aloud, looking up at the skies, over which a lowering black cloud was slowly creeping. The air was sultry, the silence oppressive, there was but little beauty in either sky or land just then, but Mignon leaned far out on the window-sill, looking abroad as though she were anxious to imprint all that she saw upon her memory. Perhaps some instinct told her that this old garden which had grown dear to her from long familiarity would never again look the same to her after to-day, that the careless happy hours of her girlhood were gone, never to return, while the cares and troubles of a woman were thickening about her path. . . . She was not conscious of thought, she simply regarded that which was before her, noting all things, from the

stray birds that flew from one tree to another, hastening to hide themselves from the coming storm, to the blood-red heart of a single rose that grew on one of the standard bushes her own hand had planted four years ago.

A faint mutter in the distance heralded the approaching storm. Mignon withdrew from the window and went back to the table where the unopened letter lay. She took it in her hand, looked at and laid it down again.

"Muriel," she whispered, and her voice sounded strange in the lonely, darkening room, "shall I open this letter, or destroy it, and so go back to the long and weary days of waiting, with the added misery of knowing that I might have learned somewhat of you, and did not. It holds tidings of you, and any news must be good to me after your long and cruel silence. . . . You cannot have done anything wrong, my Muriel, and perhaps you are expecting me—reproaching me in your heart; while I am idling here, there may be a message in this letter from you to me . . . an explanation why you do not come. . . .

"Yes! I will read it, I will face the truth, whatever it may be, for nothing can break my love for you, my beloved, nothing can make you any other than my angel of goodness, and I can bear anything that brings me nearer to you, no matter what it may be. . . ."

Once more she took the packet in her hand. As she broke the seal, a sudden glare of lightning half blinded her; as she drew the letter from the envelope, a clap of thunder shook the house to its foundations.

"Mignon," wrote Miss Sorel, "when a blow is about to be

inflicted, the only mercy that can be shown is to let it fall quickly; I will say what I have to say in the fewest possible words.

"You know that when I brought you here, Muriel, adopting your mother's name of Brook, sought and obtained a situation as governess in the family of a Mrs. Falkner, who lived in Dublin. Twice a year she came over to spend her holidays with you. Twice a week she wrote to you, and for over two years she failed neither in her visits nor her correspondence. At the end of that time all communications from her abruptly ceased, your letters and mine were returned to us, unopened, and re-directed by Mrs. Falkner. Upon my writing to that lady and inquiring for your sister, I received the intelligence that Muriel had left her suddenly, having given no reason, left no address, afforded not the slightest clue by which her whereabouts might be ascertained.

"You used to come to me and say, 'Do you think she is dead, ma'am?' and my heart grew sore for you, for I had begun to suspect that Muriel was lost to you by something of which you have never heard, and cannot even guess at . . . something compared with which death is kind and the grave a friend, in a word, Mignon, by disgrace!

"I say I suspected this, but I did not know until after.

"Do you remember the fever you had in the autumn of the year before last? In your delirium you moaned, 'Muriel! Muriel!' till it almost broke one's heart to hear you. When you were recovering, you used in the evening

to lie in the drawing-room, with Lu-Lu, or sometimes myself, for your companion. One evening I was sitting with you after dark—I in the shadow, you in the firelight, with your features plainly visible—when I saw a woman's face pressed against the window pane, peering in. She thought you were alone, for her eyes never once wandered towards me; and the intensity of her gaze, and something in the half-seen features, sent a sudden suspicion into my mind. I managed to get out of the room without a sound, so that when I came behind her in the garden she was still there. I laid my hand upon her arm; she turned and broke away from me like a mad creature, but I caught at her dress and held her fast.

"'Muriel,' I said, 'have you come at last to see Gabrielle?'

"'How do you know that I am Muriel?' she said, in a strange defiant voice that staggered me.

"It was so different to the sweet voice of the girl I had spoken with only a few months before.

"She was holding a piece of her shawl over her face, we were but a few paces from the window, but it was so dark that I could no longer distinguish her features. Nevertheless, I knew it was your sister.

"I think she dropped the shawl. I let go her dress and held her arm—a round firm arm, clasped by a heavy bracelet, that from the mere touch assured me she was not at all events suffering from poverty.

"'Let me go,' she cried, struggling violently; but I still held her with an irresistible grasp.

"'Muriel,' I said, 'do you know that Gabrielle has been very ill, that the child's life has been in danger?'

"I felt her arm tremble in my grasp, and her voice was hoarse as she whispered:

"'She is better now . . . she is recovering?'

"'Yes,' I said, 'and strangely enough she frets about you no longer, but seems happy in looking forward to the time when you will return to her.'

"She rocked herself to and fro in a strange dumb agony for some moments, then she said:

"'She does not think evil of me, she does not suspect me?'

"My soul seemed to die within me as I heard her . . . I saw the old miserable story so plainly . . . but through it all I was most conscious of pity for you—you, who had so loved and believed in her, who looked upon her as something above and beyond other women . . . and it seemed to me that your wreck of faith in her (when you should know all) was the most piteous feature in the whole case.

"She repeated her question almost fiercely. 'She does not suspect me?'

"'She does not know the meaning of evil,' I said.

"'God grant she never may!' cried Muriel, with fearful energy. 'Promise me, swear to me that you never will tell her . . . let me be for a little longer to my angel the Muriel that she used to love . . . used to love . . .'

"Her arms fell by her sides, she stood like a woman turned to stone, then she suddenly caught my hands and kissed them passionately.

"'You are a good woman,' she said, 'are you not?'

"'No,' I said, 'I only try to be.'

"'Then if you are not,' she said, 'no one is. And a good woman always keeps her promise, does she not?'

"'Yes.'

"'Then promise,' she said, holding my arm tightly, 'that you will never reveal to Gabrielle that you saw me here to-night. Swear to me that you will never tell her the thoughts that I know are in your heart concerning me to-night. Let her think me cruel, unnatural, heartless, but do not let her think me wicked. You swear it?'

"'Upon one condition only,' I said, after a few moments of thought, 'and that is, that I leave a written account of this interview with you for Gabrielle to read in case of my death.'

"'In case of your death?' she cried; 'are you ill of an incurable disease? have you any reason to think that you are likely to die before long?'

"'No,' I said, 'I have no disease that I know of; humanly speaking, I am likely to live a long while, but death may come unexpectedly to me, as to you, at any moment.'

"'Do you think that you will live two years?' she cried: 'do you think you are likely to die before that?'

"It was a strange question, asked in a strange fashion, but I understood that she wanted certain things kept from you for a certain time, and that she feared my death might interfere with her plans.

"'I cannot tell,' I said. 'Why do you say two years?'

"'Because by that time all will have come right, and I shall be able to face her, as an honest woman, without fear or shame. You will have a better opinion of me than you have to-night . . . if you knew what I have suffered, what I do suffer, you might find it in your heart to be sorry for me. . . .'

"She left my side and stole to the window. I looked over her shoulder. You were sitting by the fireside working, and there was a smile upon your lips, the first I had seen there for many weeks.

"'See!' cried Muriel, 'she smiles! Gabrielle . . . Gabrielle!"

"There was such longing in the poor creature's voice, that it made my heart ache to hear her. At last she tore herself away.

"'Think as well of me as you can,' she whispered, taking my hand in hers. 'You have promised that you will never tell her?'

"'Yes,' I said, 'I have promised.'

"'God bless you,' she said, 'but above all for the friend you have been to my Gabrielle! Do not think me thankless for your goodness, and I dare to pray for you every day. . . .'

"And with that she kissed my hands again and was gone.

"I have only seen her once since that night; it was about three months ago. She was again looking in on you from the garden, but this time from the front of the house. When I reached the place where I had seen her standing, I found

no sign of her. It seemed to me a curious and sad irony that, at the very time you were at your highest and happiest, looking forward with unclouded hope to your reunion with her, I should have become possessed of the knowledge that by her own act she had severed herself from you for ever.

"Mignon, do not look for her return; it is better for you that you should never see her face again, lest you have to endure the agony of contrasting the Muriel of your love and childhood with the Muriel that is now, and believe me when I say that, bitter as would be her loss by death, it would be merciful compared with the knowledge that she is alive, divided from you by a gulf that she can never cross—the gulf of sin.

"That she will return when the two years have elapsed I hold to be too wild an improbability to afford us any hopeful anticipation; dependent upon the capricious impulse of the man who has betrayed her, she leans but on a broken reed. . . . For the tendency of a bad man is ever towards evil, and he rarely gives the lie to his past life by one deed of conspicuous virtue.

"Mignon, if my words appear heartless and cruel to you, I beseech you to believe that they are as hard to me to write as to you to read. Comfort I cannot give you, pity I dare not offer. Only believe that you are not the first, as you will not be the last, on whom has fallen so terrible a misfortune.

"MARIE MAKEPEACE HOWEL."

Five minutes passed, ten minutes, fifteen. The hand of the clock went round to the half-hour, but still Mignon sat still, having neatly refolded the letter, and placed it in the envelope. A knock at the door came, and there entered Prue.

The storm had spent itself, the rain had ceased to fall, the sweet odours of flowers and refreshed green leaves floated in at the open window.

Prue advanced, about to speak, but when she saw the rigid attitude of the girl who sat in the chair, when she saw the awful change that had come over Mignon's face in the space of one hour — she stopped short, terror-struck.

"Miss Mignon," she cried, "don't look like that . . . don't fret so about Miss Sorel; if you haven't got any friends or home, dear heart, you've got your poor old Prue, and together we'll make our way in the world. . . ."

Mignon lifted her hand and beckoned to the woman. Prue came slowly nearer and nearer till she faced the girl.

"Prue," said Mignon slowly, and her voice was as the voice of a stranger, "what is disgrace?"

CHAPTER XVII.

"O limèd soul, that struggling to be free
Art more engaged!"

MIGNON was watching the stars, "the angels' forget-me-nots," as they came out one by one in the sky overhead,

and thinking, as so many others have thought in their misery (most of them in their youth, when trouble seems less natural than happiness; whereas to the older wayfarers, happiness is accepted as something strange and precious, theirs by no right of their own, but a gift sent straight from Heaven), "It will be all the same a hundred years hence."

This cry is the outcome of a conviction of the impotence and wastefulness of sorrow, and our weariness of life causes us to look forward to the end of it, and all it knows and comprehends, with a certain sense of relief. But although the mere utterance of the thought carries with it a dull comfort of its own, reality steps quickly in and pricks us with the thought that the hundred years are not over yet, that the meanwhile alone is our life, and must be gathered up and borne as a burthen, no matter how the flagging limbs fail us, no matter that we see no end or turning to the dark and lonely road along which our journey lies.

"Nothing cares," thought the girl, as she lifted her heavy eyes—eyes that had shed no tears throughout these seven long days—to the crescent-shaped moon, that

> "Put forth a little diamond peak,
> No bigger than an unobserved star,
> Or tiny point of fairy scimitar.
> Bright signal that she only stooped to tie
> Her silver sandals ere deliciously
> She bowed into the heavens her timid head."

A night-bird flew swiftly past . . . . out of the soft

twilight a night-wind came sighing and whispering, toying with the few precious flowers brought by Prue, that

> "Poured out their soul in odours,
> That were their prayers and their confessions;"

and the peace and stillness of the soft summer night warred against the girl's heart, so that she revolted against the heartlessness of nature. . . . . There came no voice out of the night, no sign out of the silence, and so in her longing after something that she could not compass, she said in her bitterness of spirit, "Nothing cares." Who has not felt, at some time, that Nature is a cruel and unsympathising mother to the children who love her best?

Go to her when you are happy and contented, and she will seem to rejoice and make merry with you. . . . Every one of her quivering lights and delicate tints will be a message from her heart to yours, that she knows your secret, and exults in your gladness. . . . The music of her waterfalls will be as the sound of her voice, the breath of her flowers as the words of her lips, the sunlight upon her purple hills will be as a smile that is smiled for you alone, and your heart will borrow a quicker throb and beat at feeling how perfectly it is in unison with hers . . . . but go to her when you are sad and lonely, when the only creature from whom you could brook the receiving of pity is far away, and she will heed you not. She will not silence one song of her countless birds, nor quench one of her magic lights; nay, if you die, she will wear her fairest robe, her

brightest smile, and at the very moment of your departure, she will produce some magical effect of sunlit leaf and landscape that you would, beholding it in your moments of felicity, have deemed to be a special and loving token of her harmony with your soul.

"Nothing cares." But little farther on its way of research groped the confused and childish intelligence of the lonely little creature who sat still and drooping in the old wooden chair.

There was something strangely pathetic in her absolute quietude, for it had ever been Mignon's nature to cry out sharply under pain of body or mind; but the bitterness of an adversity that was in itself irreversible, and set far beyond the merciful chance of either hope or fear, had absolutely stunned her with a crushed and helpless feeling of accomplished misery.

To Mignon all things began and ended in the present—the present, that her immature powers of suffering did not give her strength and resolution to meet . . . . she was as one who is suddenly deprived of the crutch upon which she has confidingly leaned in her troublous path, and knows not how to take one single step forward without its support.

She did not even dimly guess how Time, the Restorer, heals all wounds . . . . even if she had known it, would not her soul have rebelled against the hurt that she had received, unconsciously asking what healed wound could ever compare with the unflawed wholeness that was hers ere the knife was lifted and the blow fell? What restoration can ever compare with the dauntless confidence of untried

and unbroken health? The stain may be cleansed away, but the traces of the process remain . . . . the gaping wound may close, but the scar remains for ever . . . . we can lay our fingers upon it at any moment, and say to our hearts, "It is here" . . . . and we feel it throb and burn for many a year after others think it wholly healed and forgotten; we remember what we were in the days before we tasted of the fruit of the tree of knowledge . . . . we know what we now are . . . . not to mortals is it given to eat of the tree of knowledge, either in the shape of sin or sorrow, and henceforward be as though their shrinking lips had never touched it.

The night deepened, the countless hosts of the great army of living lights overhead had ceased to gather, and now filled the appointed places set by Him of whom it has been written, "He calleth them all by their names" . . . . but the girl sat still, trying painfully to think. And so it was that her ears were deaf to the sound of footsteps that came slowly along the gravel walk, nor did she lift her eyes when they approached nearer, and at length came to a full stop before her.

There was enough light in the sky for the new-comer to make out the outline of a fair, drooped head, and of two little slim hands, folded stiffly on a plain black gown.

"Gabrielle Ferrers!"

It was a man's voice that spoke, harsh and distinct.

She raised her head slowly, like a dull or chidden child, with whom obedience, however painful, is an instinct.

"Stand up!" the voice said.

She rose, in a strange mechanical fashion, and quietly, with no sense of wonder or of fear, recognised in the half-light the face of Silas Sorel.

He put out his hand and touched a fold of her black dress. "You wear this for your benefactress?" he said.

She bowed her head in silence. The springs of speech, as those of thought, had, for the moment, failed her.

"You have reason to regret her," he said coldly, "for she was the only friend you possessed in the world. There are men and women altogether independent of friendship, who possess the power to carve out their own lives, and need no allies, but you are not one of those women; your father was not one of those men.

"Unstable as sand, weak as water, with headstrong hearts and feeble wills, you are all bound to fulfil your destinies. Already, from afar off, I have watched the working out of those of your father and sister, and yours will in no sense be behind the others, or I have not read that true Ferrers face of yours aright."

The man paused. Mignon had listened to him, hitherto, without fear, or resentment, but now the scorn that for one moment thrust aside her pall of wretchedness, and flashed from her eyes, might surely have wakened in him some dormant spark of manliness, born in his madness of hatred and revenge.

"The death of my sister," Mr. Sorel went on, "is in every way disastrous to you. Had she lived, your home with her would have been secured until some man, fool enough to be caught by your pretty wax-doll face, spoilt his life by marrying

you; but as it is, you are deprived of your home, you have not a single friend, and you will have to earn your bread before you eat it. The world in general is apt to be cold to those who look to it for subsistence—cold, yet in some respects too kind for the safety of a young and friendless woman."

His latter words fell unheeded on Mignon's ears; she did not understand them, so that the insult of his speech had no sting in it for her. His hatred and bitterness of heart rose higher as he saw how powerless he was to move her . . . he knew nothing of the history of her griefs, he believed her silence and immobility to be but an insolent and audacious phase of the Ferrers' haughtiness and pride of bearing, and his pulses quickened with anger against her.

"Do you know what she was to me, this dead woman, who was the sweetheart of your father, the friend of his child, the gentle schoolmistress to a crew of turbulent girls that her weak hand had scarcely power to control? She was my very life itself. And I saw her carrying throughout hers, a broken heart—do you hear me? A broken heart, and your father was the man that broke it. . . . On the day that she should have become your father's wife, her heart broke instead, and I would have followed and killed him, had she not wrung from me a promise that I would never lay hand upon him. . . . It was not his fault, she said—not his fault! And thus for years we dwelt together, but the old days never came back, she was no longer my sister, but his sweetheart. . . . She came to me one day and told me that he was dead. I rejoiced, thinking 'now that he is gone

her heart will turn back to me.' But, even as he had been to her living, so was he to her dead. Not long afterwards she came to me again, and said that he had left a child to her care, and that she was resolved upon accepting the trust. I bade her choose between us, and she chose—you. The patient brother's love of a lifetime weighed not a feather against the dying wish of the man who had forsaken her. Judge then whether or no I have reason to hate you, ay, even more than I hated your father. . . . Judge whether I am likely to raise my hand to save you from the future that awaits you, for even as your ill-starred father died, even as your sister is living in shame, so shall your fate in no way fall behind that of the others, and I shall live to see you perish, even as the Book has written that all the seed of the unrighteous shall perish. . . ."

He lifted his hand in warning, his voice was terrible in its monotony, his brain had been partially overturned by intense brooding on his sister's wrongs and his own, and his semi-insanity might be read in his eyes as he peered through the half-light into the girl's face. She, recoiling at those pale and frightful features, fell back before his advances until he was face to face with her as she stood upright against the wall, when her courage suddenly failing her, and the power of speech returning, she shrieked out "ADAM!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Friend! is there any such foolish thing in the world?"

THE cry had been directed by instinct; it was the result of no conscious volition of her own.

A silence followed, which lasted some ten seconds. Then a man dropped noiselessly from the wall almost at their feet.

"You called me?" he said, relieved at finding nothing more terrible going forward than Mignon in apparently close conversation with a middle aged and extremely ill-favoured gentleman; for the cry had been such as one might utter in the extremity of fear or anguish.

"An assignation, I presume," said Silas Sorel, withdrawing a few steps from the pair; "you are beginning early, Gabrielle Ferrers."

The tone of the man who spoke conveyed a deliberate insult to the girl, none to Adam, and the latter perfectly understood him.

"An assignation," he said calmly, "is a thing that requires a previous agreement between two persons, and that such is not the case this evening, is proved by the fact that I am here only in obedience to Miss Ferrers' summons."

"Take care, take care," said Mr. Sorel, addressing Mignon, and disregarding Adam utterly, "that you do not follow the example of the girl you call Muriel!"

"Silence!" cried Mignon, stepping forward, her voice and attitude amazing the one man as thoroughly as the other;

"do not dare to name her with your lying lips! Revile the dead if you will; they are beyond the reach of your curses as of your hatred for ever, and you can wreak no pitiful revenge upon them; revile the living who are face to face with you, but do not dare to traduce one who is not here to speak for herself!"

She turned back to Adam, as though he were her friend and refuge, and indeed she had altogether forgotten her cause for anger against him; instinct guided her to him, and she went. Adam's bewilderment that it should be so was mingled with exultation that he was actually in her presence, called by her voice, looked to by her for help and protection, nay, more, that he dared to hold one of her little trembling hands securely in his own.

"Who is this man?" he asked her; "and how does he come here to insult you?"

"He is my enemy," said Mignon, "and he has no authority over me."

"This young lady, sir," said Silas, extending his hand towards her, and for the first time addressing Adam, "enjoys the proud privilege of owning not one soul upon earth who has the smallest authority over her; but as a slight drawback to her enviable position, she is an absolute pauper, without a shilling or a friend in the world, and not a home open to her save that which is furnished by a sister's shame."

"You lie!" cried Adam, dropping Mignon's hand and striding forward. "She has a friend, and he is—here!"

"And so you are her friend?" said Silas with a sneer, and again the deliberate insult his tone conveyed made the blood

boil in Adam's veins. "Did I not tell you, girl, that you would find the world, cold as it usually is, in some respects too kind to you? And we all understand what sort of friendship subsists between a young lady and a man with whom she is on such terms, that a call will at any moment bring him to her side!"

"Sir!" cried Adam, almost beside himself with fury, "do not presume too greatly upon your grey hairs, although the man who can thus shelter himself behind them is so vile a coward that he deserves to take a coward's punishment. And as to your calumnies, I hurl them back in your teeth."

"Bah!" said Silas scornfully; "you use long words, but ask her if what I have said is not true, every word of it."

Mignon's head had sunk upon her breast; a burning shame was upon her; she could not have put her hand in Adam's now if her life had depended upon it, but he took it in his own, and——

"Sir," he said, "I think you must hate this young lady very much, although I cannot conceive it possible that she has ever harmed you."

"I hate her," said Silas, slowly, "her and all her race. The men are fickle, the women are light; there is not one sound fruit upon the tree; if you desire any peace of mind, or covet an unstained life, do not place your honour in the hands of a Ferrers."

In the days to come these words were to ring in Adam's ears, and be to him as letters of fire in the darkness, although

they were now the ravings of an embittered, half-maddened man.

"Have you anything more to say?" said Adam quietly; "if not, I charge you begone, ere I force you from the gentle presence that you have outraged by your wicked, lying words."

"Before you bid your elders and betters begone, young man," said Silas, "you had better be quite sure of whose premises you are standing upon. Now, as it happens, this garden is mine, and you have committed a trespass by entering it by way of the wall; therefore it is for me to command your departure, scarcely for you to command mine."

"But," said Adam, looking down at the girl who stood beside him, "is not Miss Sorel——"

"Miss Sorel is dead," said Silas fiercely; "and as her property reverts to me, this garden is mine. Yonder house and all that it contains is mine. You will leave it," he said to Mignon, "by the day after to-morrow at sundown; you will take with you that beggarly woman who has for you so great an affection; and you will leave there not one indication that will remind me of your existence. Henceforth your place is out in the world."

"Oh! have mercy!" cried Mignon, falling on her knees; "and do not drive me away before she has come back . . . she would think I was dead, or had forgotten her, and she would go wandering about looking for me . . . and we should never find each other . . . let me live in the meanest corner of the house; but oh! do not send me away!"

A mist swept across Adam's eyes; a lump in his throat half-strangled him, as he stooped over the little kneeling figure, and raised it in his arms.

"No," said Silas; "you shall not live here. If she returns (and it's not likely) I will bid her follow you; you will probably wander about half your lives looking for each other, and that will be a worse punishment than if you found her now, although she is what she is."

A low cry broke from the girl's lips . . . his wicked words passed her by; she was conscious of but one thought, that she was to be banished from the place to which Muriel would so certainly, whether in triumph or degradation, sooner or later return.

"Mignon," said Adam, "if it be true that you are so lonely, having neither father nor mother, nor any friend at hand to take care of you, will you take me for your friend, lover, and husband? Will you come to such a home as I can give you, where we will together wait for Muriel's return?"

He felt a quiver pass through her, as though she were violently surprised and startled, but she answered him never a word. How the brave, true heart beat, as he looked across at Silas, who had retreated a step, and seemed struck with a bitter and angry dismay.

"You would marry her?" he cried.

"Ay!" said Adam, "if she will take me; if she will stoop to lay her little hand in mine, all unworthy as I am, and give me the right to cherish and protect her always; so much I will do for her, so help me God!"

"You would take her!" cried Silas, "with the knowledge

that all the Ferrers are bad—bad; that sooner or later the black drop will come out in yonder girl; that sooner or later—for they are all false—she will betray you."

"I would take her," said Adam, never loosening his hold upon the girl's drooping figure, "with all her childish faults and imperfections, with her beautiful youth, her unsoiled freshness and innocent heart, and deem her the most precious and gentle gift that ever came to the heart of man . . I would commit my honour to her keeping, and lay my future in her hands, without one doubt as to their safety, or one fear of her disloyalty; if she were able to find within her heart one little word of kindness for a poor fellow who loves, yet is not half worthy of her."

"You love me?" exclaimed Mignon.

"I have loved you for a long while."

This new puzzle for the moment distracted her attention from other things; she stood quite still, conscious, for the first time that night, of thought. Impulse and instinct had hitherto guided all her words and actions.

The two men waited for a reply. One at least would have forecast her future with a certain amount of truth had that answer been in the negative.

"You would help me to find her?" she said, pursuing her train of thought, and looking earnestly into Adam's half-seen face.

"I would."

"And let me live close by here with Prue, so that we might take it in turn to watch by the gates, in case she came?"

"Yes, you should live close by."

She put her hand to her head.

"Wait a moment," she said; "I have got a hundred pounds, my very own; would it buy a shelter for Prue and me, and feed and clothe us for some time, perhaps only until the autumn comes, perhaps a great deal longer?"

"It would not last a great while."

She fell to thinking again; then said:

"And if she did not come here, if it were necessary, you would with me search the world through from end to end until we had found her?"

He hesitated, but only for a moment.

"Yes."

She turned without a word, and put both her hands into his. Adam held her fast, but did not speak. So they faced the enemy, young, brave, and handsome . . . so he beheld them afterwards defying him. Even so in the future one of them at least remembered that cruel, wicked face, and the smile that curled his thin and bloodless lips as he stood, his arms folded, looking at them.

"I wish you joy of her," he said coldly. "When we meet again, it will be a matter of the profoundest amazement to me if I discover that this young lady still retains the place in your esteem that she at this moment occupies. Miss Ferrers—sir—I have the honour to wish you good-evening."

CHAPTER XIX.

"Half happy, by comparison of bliss, is miserable."

As the echo of his footsteps died away, Adam looked down thoughtfully into Mignon's pale face. It took a faint warmth beneath his gaze, for she was ashamed . . . in a moment's space he had been transformed from her friend and champion to a scarcely known lover, whose presence filled her with uneasiness . . . the former had been something to hold fast by and value, the latter oppressed her with a dull sense of discomfort and strangeness.

He was instantly conscious of the change in her, but did not let her go.

"Mignon," he said, "after all is your answer 'No'?"

As he looked, he found himself no longer seeking the answer to his question, but recognising with dismay the change that had come over her face during these past ten days, and not possessing the key of the puzzle beyond the fact of Miss Sorel's death, he was at a loss to comprehend it.

"I am tired," she said slowly. Then, when she was seated, he knelt down by her side, on the very spot, as it suddenly occurred to him, where Rideout had knelt, a fortnight ago that very day.

The girl did not speak . . . a wheel seemed to be going round and round in her head . . . the waters of affliction, held back for a brief period by the strange events of the past hour, were rushing back upon her with resistless fury, and again from her soul and heart and body rose the yearning bitter cry of "Muriel" . . . "Muriel" . . . while her sole

consciousness was shame and misery. Presently she looked up, and seeing Adam's face close to her, a ray of curiosity flashed across her own.

"How long ago was it," she said slowly, "that I called you a liar, and a thief, and a spy?"

"A long while ago," he said gently; "do not think about it."

"And after calling you those names," she went on more slowly still, "you offer me a home and . . . your love. For you said you loved me?"

"Yes."

"No, you do not," she said in the same stiff, careful way; "you only pity me. . . . How can you love a person who said such things to you? You only said so out of kindness, and to show that bad old man I had one friend."

"Mignon," he said, "I have been your faithful lover longer than you think, even before I came over the wall and weeded your garden. . . . I have watched you growing up for these past two years, for I said to myself, 'When she is old enough, I will go to Miss Sorel, and ask her openly for leave to try and win her for my little sweetheart.'"

"And that was why you came over the garden-wall?" she said.

"No; I had not meant to approach you in any clandestine manner, but a foolish impulse prompted me . . . at that time of the morning I never dreamt of your coming out; but you came, and then——"

He paused, but she seemed to have relapsed into apathy, and did not speak.

"At first you believed me to be the man who had written you the love-letter; then, before I had in any way recovered from the confusion into which I was thrown by your sudden appearance (for remember that I loved you, and was now for the first time in your presence), you asked me whom I might be? In the moment that I hesitated, I saw your eyes fall upon my shirt-sleeves, and almost before the thought had formed itself, my lips had uttered the title given me by my sister Flora, 'Adam, the gardener.'"

"She calls you that?"

"The term is applied contemptuously," he said. "All my life long I have been fond of working in my garden, and she is pleased to marvel at the lowness of my tastes."

"Then it was not quite a lie," said the girl, sighing, "but you should not have come again . . . you would not have acted dishonestly then."

"No," he said, "I should not have come again, but the temptation was too great to be resisted . . . to look, not furtively, but openly, at your face, to hear your voice, to hear you addressing me, and to watch you, yourself so utterly unconscious, it was not in human nature to cast this delight away, and so I followed you, in some clothes borrowed for the purpose, to Madame Tussaud's, and afterwards I came over and weeded your gravel-walks."

"But why did you steal the letter?" she said, still trying, through all her giddy sense of confusion and misfortune, to follow out a line of special thought.

"Because, at that time"—he laid a certain stress upon the last three words that Mignon did not observe—"I would

rather have seen the girl I loved in a coffin, than receiving or replying to a letter from the man whom you knew as Philip Rideout, and"—his voice grew lower—"it maddened me to think that to this man, who was in no sense fit to approach you, should be written your first love-letter. . . ."

"Then you were listening," cried Mignon, shrinking from him, "you watched me write it from the other side of the wall?"

"Yes," said Adam slowly, "I listened to you. . . . I could not love you as I do to-night if I did not know every thought of your innocent heart . . . if I were not so sure that your face is but the reflection of your mind, if I had not assured myself with my own ears that I had not erred in placing all the hopes of my life upon you. Nevertheless," he sighed, "it was a fatal mistake, Mignon."

He paused for some seconds, then went on again.

"Mignon," he said, "there is one thing that I have to tell you—and perhaps when it is told you will bid me go away from you, for it may be that to him you have given your first fancy, and when you become aware"—he paused.

"It is this," he went on, firmly: "the man you know as Mr. Rideout is free to woo you honestly to be his wife."

"Then that too . . . was another lie?" she said almost in a whisper.

O Mignon! . . . Mignon, how could you . . . he turned aside, asking himself how he was to expect the honour and duty of a wife from one who doubted the truth of every word he spoke?

A bad beginning! A bad beginning!

"No," he said, "it was true."

"But you said he was married?"

"He was—at that time."

"Then is his wife dead?"

"No—not dead."

How could he tell this girl the story? It was curious that two utterly dissimilar men were equally and earnestly desirous of keeping from Mignon all knowledge of evil.

She remained so still, that Adam said, "Are you thinking, Mignon, that you would have been happier with him? That if I had not scared you by a warning, you would have chosen him—not me?"

"No," she said at last, "but I was thinking . . . that perhaps (if you are quite sure that he is free) I might have married him and saved you the trouble . . . for I do not think he would have minded marrying me, he seemed so very sure and certain that he did want to marry me, and was so angry when I said 'No' . . . whereas you only asked me out of kindness, because you heard that wicked man say I had no friends; and indeed it was a generous and noble thing of you to do, but I do not wish to take advantage of it, because I like you better than I do him, though I dare say he would help me to find her as well as you could, and I think he would be really grateful to me if I said 'Yes.' . . ."

"But if you like me best," he said, clinging resolutely to the only crumb of comfort that her speech contained, "why should you marry him, for I love you too?"

"But he will be so angry," said Mignon wearily, her interest beginning to flag; "he said if I dared to marry any one else he would follow me through the world, but he would find me at last, and really I think he is quite determined enough to do it."

"I shall know how to protect my own," said Adam gravely; "and when did he say he should return, Mignon?"

"He said that I was to look for him any hour after the fourteenth day had passed."

"And the fortnight is up to-day," said Adam; "he may be here to-morrow—to-night even!"

The girl's head had drooped again, she did not even hear him, her soul had gone back to Muriel.

Adam was thinking deeply. "I will not hasten things by one hour on his account," he said to himself, "but if he should come, it will be a bad business—bad."

"Adam," said Mignon almost in a whisper, "you heard what he said—that wicked man, about her?"

"Yes."

"It is true," she whispered back again, "or so they say. . . ."

He did not immediately speak; this revelation of her family life was terrible to him . . . up to this time he had not believed the words of Silas Sorel, although he knew some strange mystery hung about the fate of Mignon's sister. . . . Like all men, he wished the surroundings of the woman he loved to be absolutely unassailable, and was not proof against the decree of society that affixes a stigma of disgrace to all the female members of a family, one of whom has

swerved from the path of virtue, and been found out, thereby sullying those other innocent creatures who are guiltless of aught save their fatal relationship to her.

"They say it is true . . ." went on Mignon piteously, "and they know better than I; but how could she be wicked, and she said she would come back at the end of two years?"

And then Adam felt, with a sharp pang, that all his care for her had been in vain . . . that her mind was no longer a page upon which had been written no word of harmful meaning.

"When my poor love comes back to me," went on the girl's soft voice, "as she will come to me some night or day, you will not by word or look show her that she is unwelcome, or drive her away?"

"I will not drive her away," he said slowly, but in his heart he was praying that Muriel might never come back to bring disgrace to her sinless little sister.

"The only creature that I love in the whole world," she said, below her breath, "the heart of my heart, the life of my life. . . ."

He heard her, but was in no whit dismayed. How could he expect her to love him yet? While he had been learning her disposition, studying her face, he had been a perfect stranger to her, and he was not one to value hasty love.

"We will not draw down the blinds at night," she said dreamily, "lest she should come and look in, and we should not see her, but some night I shall see her beautiful

pale face against the glass, as Miss Sorel did, and then I shall run out and bring her in . . . at home at last. . . ."

He shivered.

"Mignon," he said presently, "did you hear what Mr. Sorel said? That yonder house was his, and all within it, and that you must go away from it on the day after to-morrow?"

"I had forgotten," she answered, putting her hand to the brow that ached so terribly; "but he cannot prevent me from sitting at his gates; a beggar has a right to do that —any one."

"I have a plan in my head," he said soothingly, "by which it is possible we may regain possession of the house; but to carry it out we must be very quiet and cautious, or he will discover it all, and thwart us—in short, Mignon, we must go away."

"Go away?" she repeated blankly; "but indeed I cannot — I cannot—it is quite impossible!"

"But, Mignon, you must," said Adam firmly, "unless you mean to lose all chance of living here, and you do not wish to do that?"

"How long should we be away?" said Mignon anxiously; "three days—a week—a fortnight?"

"I cannot tell," he said; "it will depend upon the length of time certain matters take to arrange."

"And the sooner I go away, the sooner I shall come back —is it so?" she asked feverishly.

"Yes."

"Then let us go to-morrow morning," she cried; "it will not take me an hour to pack up, and——"

"But, Mignon," said the young man, hesitatingly, "we must be married first, you know!"

"I had forgotten all about that," she said, suddenly sobered; "but it doesn't take very long—to get married, does it?"

"No."

"I don't see why we should be married at all," she said wistfully; "why can't you be kind to me always, and look after me? for I have got the money I told you about, and I dare say it would last me till Muriel comes back, and then we could go away and make some more money together——"

"Mignon," he said, gently, "I am not your brother, so I could not look after you and take care of you as if I were, and I do not think you know how hard a young girl like you would find the world; and you promised me, Mignon . . ."

"If you are quite sure," said the girl, "that you do not very much mind marrying me, and that you will not some day be sorry for having done so kind a thing, why, then, I will marry you to-morrow—next day—whenever you please, only make haste and bring me back again!"

"Then we will be married the day after to-morrow," he said, and put his arms round her and gently drew the weary head down to his shoulder.

But as he stroked the sunny hair that lay on his breast, he said to himself, "It has all been too quick . . . too quick . . . could I but have had time, she might have

learned to love me . . . were it not for Philip La Mert, I would wait; but it is a pity—a pity—more, it is not fair to her, and it is hard to me. . . ."

A dusky shadow stepped out of the gloom, and looked down with amazement upon the young man supporting the girl, who was too worn out with misery, excitement, and pain to reject that kindly aid.

"Prue," said Adam, touching a fold of Mignon's black dress, "will you get ready a plain white gown for your mistress? for she is going to marry me the day after to-morrow."

CHAPTER XX.

"Had I your tongue and eyes, I'd use them so
That heaven's vault should crack.
O! She is gone for ever!"

A SLIM young figure in a white gown, standing before a looking-glass, fastening a white rose against a soft, round throat . . . a woman standing by, divided between smiles and weeping . . . a young man pacing a garden with rapid footsteps, and glancing from time to time at the watch he holds in his hands . . . a lover hastening as fast as horse's feet will carry him to the longed-for realisation of his dearest hopes, while his eager imagination outspeeds his speed, and pictures to him the form, the face, of the girl whom we saw but now looking in her mirror . . . an elderly clergyman walking slowly up the narrow path that leads to the vestry door,

marvelling a little at the short notice he has received of the marriage he is about to celebrate . . . a pew-opener, deciding that for folks who are going to be married without friends, carriages, bridesmaids, or anything whatever that befits the occasion, she need make no attempt at their reception, beyond setting the church-door half open, and dusting the altar steps: these are the pieces that will by-and-by fall into their places in the morning's puzzle.

* * * * * *

The bride, with neither smile, nor blush, nor tear, has made her vows, and her husband has kissed her lips, for the first time. The waiting-woman no longer hovers between joy and sorrow, her face is as bright as the sunlight that falls on the red and black tiles at her feet. The clergyman has shut his book, and is wondering how it comes that this young girl has no friend to stand beside her, or relation to forbid her marrying so young; and the man who is now nearing his destination feels his heart stand still in the expectation of the vision and the greeting he so fondly believes are awaiting him. . . .

* * * * * *

They are out of the church; they have signed their names in the register. Mignon has said "good-morning" to the clergyman, just as though she were used to being married every day of her life, puzzling that good gentleman all the more by her remarkable absence of embarrassment, and has put her hand in Adam's and come away, quite simply and gladly, with her head full of the thought that the sooner she shall go away, the

sooner can she return. They go along the quiet roads together to Rosemary, where the travelling carriage waits, ready packed, and there is nothing for them to do but just take their seats, and set off upon their travels, for they breakfasted two hours ago, and within doors there is not a soul to bid them good-bye and good-luck, or to send a slipper and a shower of rice flying after their chariot wheels.

At the gate Mignon drew her hand away. "I am going to say good-bye to my garden," she said, and Adam, understanding her humour, went into the house to speak with Prue, so that she passed on her way alone.

She sat down on the old wooden chair and gazed around her. Everything looked the same, yet the world and all things within it had changed to her in more ways than one since the time when she rode in her wheelbarrow with such grand content, and was as happy as the days were long. Now she was riding away in a real coach, taking with her a heavier heart than she had ever dreamed of then.

A bang of the garden-door made her look up, thinking Adam had come to fetch her. In the act of rising, she involuntarily sat down again, for she recognised in the newcomer, not Adam, but Philip Rideout. Worn by excitement and want of rest, haggard with remorse and passion, his dark face startled her with its wild beauty, as, hastily traversing the few steps that lay between them, and kneeling down by her side, he clasped his arms about her waist and cried:

"Mignon! I come back to you—free!" . . .

She gazed down upon him without a word, powerless to release herself from his embrace, and he, looking up at her through all the confusion of brain and heart that possessed him, instantly missed something out of that childish face . . . the beauty was still there, but the radiant joyous freshness, the guileless innocence, where were they now? Something had gone from her . . . something had come to her . . . of this he was certain, but—what?

A kind of horror grew slowly in his eyes, reflected, perhaps from hers, for she feared him; then his glance fell on the hand upon which the plain gold wedding-ring shone.

He withdrew his right hand from her waist, and lifted her hand, turned it over, looked at it on the other side, parted the third and fourth fingers as though to make sure that the circlet was perfect, going through all this slowly and carefully, like a madman, who knows himself to be mad, yet is trying to follow out the one thought that he equally knows to be rational . . . still holding her hand, he looked up piteously, unsteadily, into the girl's face, then down again at her fingers. . . .

"Stolen!" he said in a whisper, "stolen!" and fell down like a dead man.

* * * * * *

When Adam entered the garden a few seconds later in search of his wife, it was to discover her leaning over an insensible man, and gazing stupidly into his face.

He stood still for a moment, his brain on fire, then he went on again.

"He is dead!" said Mignon.

"Mignon . . ." said Adam, scarcely knowing what he said, the agony of his heart making his voice harsh and abrupt, "Come away from that man . . . I command you not to touch him!"

A vain command! She was powerless to free herself from those heavy clinging arms!

She strove to rise, but could not.

Adam drew Rideout's arms away, and made a gesture to Prue, who had followed him into the garden, to take Mignon's place.

"You will attend to this man," he said, "and use every means to restore him. Should you require other assistance, you will summon it, but he has merely fainted."

Then he turned to Mignon and took her hand in his. "Come!" he said.

"And leave him like that?" she cried in amazement. "Oh! how can you think of such a thing? Why, he may be dead!"

The hand that held hers closed so tightly and suddenly upon it, that she almost cried aloud for the pain, and yet he was not conscious of using any roughness, but he was for the moment out of himself. . . .

"Come!" he said quietly.

She caught her breath hard and looked up into his face, which bore in its clearly-cut features and firm square jaw

ample indications of will and determination; then she wrenched her hand out of his, and flinging both her arms round Prue's neck, cried with passionate tears, "I will stay with you—with you!—and oh! how I wish with all my heart and soul that I had not been married to-day!"

Some of those tears fell upon the weary careworn face resting against Prue's shoulder, but the man neither stirred nor spoke; the stupor of utter exhaustion was upon him, and bound him hand and foot.

"Come!" said Adam for the third time, but as he spoke, he remembered how only two nights ago he had sworn to be kind to her always . . . to be gentle with her . . . and this was the fulfilment of his vow!

"Take care of him, Prue," said Mignon, as she gave Prue a last frantic hug. "Poor fellow—poor fellow! And be sure and tell him that I wanted to wait until he was better, but that Adam would not let me."

"There," said Prue in a whisper, as the girl still clung to her, "go now, dear heart, your husband's waiting for you—your husband as loves you dearly, and him as you've sworn to honour and obey . . . but come back to me soon, my heart, for it's sad I shall be without you, though never fear but I'll keep good watch for her, so don't fret yourself about that. . . ."

Why did the girl still pause to look down long and wistfully at the face of the man to whom she had written her first love-letter, and whose looks she had never liked when he was strong, and bold, and gay? Why did she, sobbing

bitterly, as she went along the path by her husband's side, pause at the door that he held open for her, and stand for some seconds still looking back? Then the door closed . . . and the last page in the first volume of the book of Mignon's life was turned.

END OF BOOK 1.

BOOK II.

FRUIT.

CHAPTER I.

AT BIGNON'S.

"Whoso encamps
To take a fancied city of delight,
O! what a wretch is he! and, when 'tis his
After long toil and suffering, to miss
The kernel of his hopes, how more than vile!"

"FOR what we are going to receive," said Mignon, distinctly, with folded hands, "the Lord make us truly thankful. Amen."

The superb and benign Henri, who himself condescended to remove the cover from the soup, all used to English folks and ways as he was, turned aside to avoid a smile. One or two pretty Americans, dining at adjacent tables with their husbands, looked quickly up, interested and amused. Monsieur, eating slowly and heedfully, for to dine at Bignon's every day comes not to the average Frenchman, regarded the English girl, firstly with grave deliberation, lastly, and by successive stages, with warm and candid approval. Probably no man on earth is a better judge of a woman's looks

than he; his judgment is never given until he has carefully and conscientiously examined the object of his criticism from head to foot. Led away by no fascination of glance, or fugitive richness of colouring, he permits no detail of face, figure, or style to escape him; and when he has noted all, from the fashion of her hair to the set of her gown and the shape of her foot, he will be in a position to tell you whether by one hair's-breadth she falls short of absolute excellence, or is perfect at all points. In the latter case, he is capable of appreciating her more thoroughly than would any other man of any other nationality under the sun.

Adam, his soup finished, looked across at Mignon, who, in her white gown with its black ribbons, had nothing whatever in face, look, or manner to lead one to suppose she was married, save the plain gold ring and keeper on her little hand.

To his surprise she was looking full at him. It was rarely, indeed, that she did so. The old fearless gaze had died out of her eyes since her marriage, her glance turned aside from his, as though she were frightened or ashamed . . . but now he was quick to note how a tinge of colour had stolen into those snow-white cheeks, how a ripple of laughter trembled upon her lips, and how for the first time in the past fortnight she seemed, for the moment at least, so exhilarated by the novelty and gaiety of the scene about her as absolutely to have forgotten.

"You like it?" he said. "You are glad that we came, Mignon?"

"Yes, indeed!" she said. "It is delightful—ever so much

pleasanter than dining in our own rooms, with nobody in the world to look at but one another and Alphonse."

"He is, at any rate, more merciful to our nerves than are these *garçons*," said Adam calmly. "If the equanimity with which every one endures the noises made by himself were not an established fact, what terrible lives these fellows would lead!"

"No doubt if we waited upon them they would suffer as much at our hands as we do at theirs," said Mignon gaily; "but I am quite willing to put up with all their crashes if you will bring me here again to-morrow."

"Of course we will come again," he said, "if you wish it."

"We will dine at quite a fashionable hour," cried Mignon, "eight o'clock, exactly the time that I used to go to bed at Rosemary until I was fifteen, and I will order the dinner and the wines, and the liqueurs, and everything! And you shall see," she added triumphantly, "that I will spend just as much money on it as you would!"

"Only I am afraid you would come to grief over the *menu*," said Adam, laughing; "for you know, Mignon, that though Mdlle. Lacroix reckoned you her best French scholar, you do not always call things and persons by their right names, and it was only this afternoon that you wounded the feelings of our driver by addressing him as '*cochon*'!"

"Anybody might make such a mistake as that!" said Mignon, with dignity. "It is perfectly ridiculous that any language should have two words so wonderfully alike—and I shall always think that I know as much real French as you do—only you have got all the accent, while I have none!"

"Have you not?" said Adam, gravely. "Now do you, know, Mignon, that I should have said you had a great deal! For instance, when you went into that shop this afternoon, and asked for a box of *A. Pangles*——"

"At any rate," said Mignon, with red cheeks, "I got what I wanted; they understood me perfectly! Whereas if you had gone in, you would have put so much fine accent and so little sense into the request, that very likely you would not have got them at all!"

"In short," said Adam, seriously, "we make one excellent French scholar between us; but, like the two-headed nightingale, it would be death to separate us."

"If it came to translating a page of Télémaque," said Mignon, nodding wisely, "I know which would get the best of it; some day we'll try."

Télémaque . . . how the familiar name sent his thoughts travelling backwards. . . . Mignon must have been a baby in arms when he was studying the book.

"Adam," she said, dropping her voice to a discreet whisper, "have I got a large black on my nose?"

"No!"

"Or a crooked parting" (she had removed her hat), "or —or anything remarkable, nothing one way or the other to make a person keep on staring at me?"

Adam looked across at the winsome English face, that in the streets, the public promenades, the theatres (wherever, indeed, it appeared), drew all eyes after it, as the sun does the flowers, and wondered in his heart how much longer she would retain that crown of beauty—unconsciousness.

"No," he said, "I don't see anything amiss with you. Why?"

"Would you mind very much if I were to make a face at somebody?" she said, still disregarding his question.

"I should mind it very much indeed," he said hastily. "What on earth can make you wish to do that, Mignon?"

"Because there is a rude man who has done nothing but stare at me since he came in—and a moment ago he deliberately smiled at me!"

"Did he indeed?" said Adam, smiling himself; "never mind, dear, don't look at him."

"But he is sitting just behind you," she said, frowning, "and every time I look at you I can't help seeing him!"

"Then you must not look at me!" he said, leaning forward, as though the direction taken by his own looks formed no part of the agreement.

She was holding a rich red strawberry to her lips, and as he looked, a dimple in one cheek peeped suddenly out; then, seeming to repent of its sally, went in again.

"But supposing I like to look at you?" she said. In her fresh, clear young voice was neither falter nor sign of hesitation. The tone might have been that of a sister to a brother, or of one *bon camarade* to another; nevertheless it set her husband's heart beating with hope.

"*L'amour!*" sighed a fat Frenchman, who sat at a table close by. Armed with the inevitable toothpick, and well satisfied with the dinner he had eaten, he was regarding the spectacle of two young people, who had apparently paused

in the business of dessert to look at one another, with sensations of the profoundest pity.

Mignon's eyes strayed past Adam, and he saw by the sudden contraction of the pupils that they were intently regarding something or somebody in the distance.

He did not turn his head, although every moment he expected to hear a hasty step, a loud voice . . . and then a scene to follow.

"What are you looking at, Mignon?" he asked quietly.

"At a young man," she said, "and O! such a wonderful one! I am sure Count D'Orsay in his palmiest days could not have beaten him. Did you not tell me the other day that these men are called *Gommeux?*"

"So they are," he said, a weight lifted from his mind; ("after all," he thought, "I am not to have this, the happiest evening I have ever known with her, destroyed by him")—"and under Henri III. they had your own very name—they were called *Mignons;* while under the Regency they were dubbed *roués*, because of Philip of Orleans' well-known speech, that every one of them deserved to be *roué*, or broken on the wheel."

"What is a *roué?*" said Mignon, as she traced out a fanciful pattern on her dessert-plate with her strawberry stalks.

Adam, looking up, and encountering the eyes of a man who was at that moment passing him, felt it to be one of those coincidences of which life is full, that at the very moment when he was hesitating what reply to make her, a striking illustration should present itself.

"A bad man, Mignon," he said.

Even as he spoke he was looking Philip La Mert, who had seated himself at a table placed against the wall immediately behind Mignon, as calmly in the face as though he were a perfect stranger, whose appearance at Bignon's called for no surprise on his part.

"And so," thought Adam, "he does not intend to make a scene; he knows that it would do no good, his plot is something deeper; nevertheless—courage!"

Mignon had left off eating her strawberries, and was now drinking coffee.

The brightness of her mood had passed away; the anxious look had crept back to her eyes, the colour had faded out of her cheeks, leaving her, like Christabel,

"Fair, not pale."

It seemed to Adam—and the time came when what then was but an unreasonable fancy recurred to him with all the force of a fulfilled prophecy—that the mere shadow of this man falling upon the girl had power to dim her brightness, and to check the gentle growth of those slender, lovely tendrils of regard that she was beginning to put forth towards himself.

"You think there will be a letter from Prue to-morrow?" she said, looking at him anxiously. "I have not heard for two whole days, you know, and perhaps something may have happened. . . ."

"You are sure to hear from her to-morrow," he said hastily, for just now the object of his life was to keep her

dered in him a more concentrated fury than he had known even in the first frustration of his hopes, and if on all the earth that night there was a man ripe for crime, it was Philip La Mert.

In the countenances of those he passed, he read an indication of what was in his own, for as he went by, all the occupants of the room shrank from him.

As he stood without, his brain somewhat steadied by the cool night air, he saw Mignon and her husband drive away.

In another moment he, too, was in a carriage, following them. "Thank God!" he cried aloud, lifting his eyes, impious as his words, to heaven, "that she does not love him! No, nor ever shall! He stole her from me; let him look to it that I do not take my own back again, a something better than the loveless girl who gave him her vows—no more—who shall give me her heart, her soul!"

On, on, they drove, the pursuer and the pursued, through the brilliant streets of the beautiful city, that is surely as enchanted as any of which we read with bated breath in our nursery days.

No sooner does one breathe the air of Paris, than one is infected by that *gaieté de cœur* that is the distinguishing characteristic of the Parisian, and the heart quickens into vivid enjoyment. "See Naples and die!" says the proverb; it might be, "See Paris and live!" for there is an intoxication of life in her very air, and she is a city of neither yesterday nor to-morrow, but—to-day; for she remembers not her reverses and her humiliations—only in her heart live, fresh [redacted] green, her glories, her victories, and the crowns of her

heroes. Emerging with radiant smile from the darkest abyss of shame and degradation, she dashes the blood from her brow, the foam from her lips, and, crowning herself with lilies, calls upon her children to arise and rejoice with her.

Such an one, though stricken oft and violently by fate, rent by her own passions, can never die—though her glory be dimmed, yet can it never be utterly quenched; for the life she bears is a charmed one, and no more to be destroyed than the rainbow, whose colours fade indeed, but only to return again in all their splendour.

And so it is that her children, though oftentimes in their senseless fury they turn upon and rend her, yet love her with a deep and exceeding love, that she is the idol of the Frenchman's youth, maturity, and old age.

"Mignon," said Adam, rousing himself as the carriage stopped at the place where they usually descended for the Champs Elysées, "I beg your pardon for being such a dull companion, but I have been—thinking——"

"Hark!" she said, lifting her hand as they stood together on the veritable Elysian fields, where thousands of lamps glittered, and thousands of people went to and fro, "do you hear that girl's voice yonder? Let us go and listen!"

They passed into one of those strange, poetic, open-air concerts, with the blue sky for a spangled canopy, through the crowd of upturned faces, all directed towards the gaily-dressed, sweet voiced woman who faced them, smiling from the centre of the brilliantly-lit, gaudy stage.

Mignon, glancing up at the low screen of delicate leaves above her, met the eyes of a man who was passing by to his

place. "Adam," she said, pulling gently at his hand with a certain hurry and excitement in her soft voice, "did you see him? Is it possible?"

CHAPTER II.

"'Tis the pest
Of love, that fairest joys give most unrest;
That things of delicate and tenderest worth
Are swallowed all, and made a second dearth
By one consuming flame . . . ."

MIGNON was leaning out of one of the windows of the Hôtel Bristol, engaged in dropping small pellets of bread on something or somebody below. She was such a long way up, and the object of her attention such a long way beneath, that her missiles seemed to fall quite slowly, and were every one wide of the mark. At last, however, by dint of perseverance, she succeeded in hitting the target at which she had been aiming, and which was the driver of a *voiture de remise* that was drawn up, apparently waiting for some person or persons to come out of the hotel.

The man looked all about him, and finally upwards, when he discovered the charming head thrust out through an open window, that nodded with much energy, saying, as plainly as it could speak by a nod, "*Attendez!*"

The man, recognising her, made a gesture to show that he understood, then sat immovable as before.

Adam, entering the *salon* just as Mignon's most energetic

nods and becks were going forward, advanced to her side, put out his head, and looked down also.

"It was so lucky I saw him," said Mignon, drawing in her head, and blinking her sun-dazzled eyes. "I do believe he was on the point of going away, quite out of patience, when I made him look up; and I would not have had him go for the world!"

Mr. Montrose, looking abroad and about with keen, quick scrutiny, could discover nothing, or at any rate nothing that he had expected or feared to see. Then a thought struck him.

"He is coming up," he said calmly. "It was to him, then, that you were beckoning?"

"Coming up?" she said, staring at him; "why should he do that, and how can he leave his horse and carriage?"

Adam broke into relieved laughter as he looked out and recognised the conveyance, that, from the height whence he regarded it, reminded him of the chariot horsed and driven by the Industrious Fleas.

"I do believe," he said, "that it is your *cochon*, Mignon! But what is he doing there?"

"Have you forgotten," said the girl, popping her head out again, "that we told him to come for us at ten o'clock this morning punctually? And now," she added reproachfully, as she drew her flushed face in again, "it is nearly half-past!"

"And whose fault is that, Mignon?" said Adam, laughing. "Did you not persist in sacrificing comfort to a fine view? and when people live in the clouds, must you not make

allowance for the time it takes to descend and get up again?"

"There is always the lift," said Mignon, putting on her hat, and taking her cloak from a chair hard by; "and it does seem such a pity to waste the morning hours, the best of all the day."

The July sun was pouring his flood of light full upon the gay, bright *salon*, upon the man who leant his shoulders against the window-frame, and looked at his wife, upon the girl who stood thoughtfully tying her strings, altogether unconscious of his gaze.

"Mignon," said Adam, looking at her critically, "I don't know much about those matters—but isn't your cloak a little—a little old-fashioned, dear?"

"How long ago did Red Riding Hood live?" said the girl. "A hundred—five hundred years—a thousand? Just as old as she is, so old is my cloak, for if it were made in red instead of black, it would be the very counterpart of hers!"

"We must buy you a new one," he said; "though I don't think we can afford Worth!" he added, laughing.

"He would show me the door if I went," said Mignon, with conviction, as she drew a "Marshal Niel" rose from the bouquet that Adam had just brought in. "Did you not tell me yesterday that from the depths of his soul he despises an insignificant slender person, while he loves to dress a fine large woman with a presence?"

"Then," said Adam, "we will wait, Mignon, until you have developed into a fine woman, or at any rate something very different to what you are now!"

"Shall we ever come here again, I wonder?" she said, her eyes straying past him to the goodly city stretched out at her feet. "I hope not . . . at least, without her."

"You have not yet given me a flower for my button-hole," said Adam quietly.

Every morning, and to him it was the shortest, sweetest minute of the whole day, she was wont to fasten a flower in his coat.

"I beg your pardon!" she said, turning at once, and, selecting a pale bud from among its brighter sisters, with her eyes still full of thought, she put up her little gloved hands and fastened the flower in its place.

The stalk was troublesome, she was a little longer than usual over her task, yet he stood perfectly still and silent, scarcely glancing, to all appearance, at the beautiful face he loved so well. How gentle he had to be with her, how patient, no one would ever know.

He had by now so schooled himself in self-command, that she never dreamed how the temptation often rose within him to pray her, for God's sake, to try and love him a little—only a little, and so give back for the plenty he poured upon her, some better return than the heart-bareness that was his portion. But Mignon knew nothing of this. To all appearance he was far more indifferent and at his ease than she. In the depths of her eyes he sometimes thought he discovered a something that was not fear, but rather a dumb and piteous reproach, inducing in him some such shame as a man might experience who had taken from a child's ignorant generous hand a toy, of which it knew not then the exceeding value,

but to the loss of which awakening by-and-by, it regards with helpless condemnation the man that has taken it.

"There!" said Mignon, stepping back and looking at the now garnished button-hole, "it really is very pretty indeed! I never fastened a better! But indeed that poor old fellow will think we are playing him a trick, and we have such a lot to do to-day!"

"Yes," said Adam, "there is a great deal to do to-day!" but he was thinking of other matters than she. As they left the room together, it occurred to him how, each time Philip La Mert had spoken with Mignon, she had worn a rose at her breast, and she was wearing one to-day!

Away they went through the clear bright morning, along the cool freshly-watered streets, while the early fruits that seemed to have overflowed the shops to the pavements beyond, were here, there, and everywhere, as also the countless flowers that, in their gay profusion, seemed to tell how, out yonder, beyond the great city, the world was all ablaze with summer.

"What a delightful thing it is," said Mignon, with a sigh of relief, "to be for once behind a horse that will go. All the others we have had simply crawled."

"Yes," said Adam, absently, and wishing with all his heart that the animal in question would go faster still; for one backward glance, given immediately after leaving the hotel, had informed him that they were followed.

In the midst of his pre-occupation he could not help smiling . . . this wild-goose chase seemed to him so laughable an affair; and, after all, what did the pursuer promise

himself? Adam needed only to remind himself that Mignon was his wife to shake off all apprehension of anything save the unpleasantness from which an Englishman always shrinks; but the thing worried him unaccountably.

"Would you mind if we drove in the Bois first and to the post-office afterwards, Mignon?" said Adam.

It was their custom to fetch their letters daily, and afterwards read them as they went on their expeditions; but the girl was always restless and anxious until she knew for certain whether there was, or was not, a letter from Prue, so her face fell, and Adam saw it.

"You will not go very far? For I have got it in my head that there will be some news to day."

"We will go no farther than you wish," he said—then gave some rapid order to the driver that she could not catch.

"I wonder," said Mignon, thoughtfully, as they passed swiftly along the famous Avenue that, not so long ago, was the vantage-ground of luxury and folly, "whether it would be better to begin climbing the Arc de Triomphe over night, or to start very early in the morning, and so have a reasonable chance of reaching the top before dark?"

"Get up early in the morning, by all means," said Adam, "as I wish you to see Paris from it by night, when the lamps are lit; but there are not quite so many stairs as you suppose!"

"It ought to be very good," said Mignon, "considering the trouble it is to get there! So far as I can make out, the Monument was the merest joke to it!"

"And did you ever climb that—really?"

"Yes, indeed, the whole school! But when I got to the top—I don't know how it was—but I could only walk two-double! I had a dreadful feeling that if I stood upright it would all topple over! And once—I thought I should have died of fright—it actually shook."

"I can faithfully promise you that the Arc de Triomphe will not!" said Adam gravely, "no, not if it were burdened with ten thousand such thistledown slips of girls as you, Mignon!"

They are in the Bois now. Mignon comes to it every day, and always at an unfashionable hour, either quite early, or rather late, and she knows every winding way, and nook, and corner of it. When she first beheld it, she was wild with joy and surprise, but now she enjoys it in that best and most perfect of all ways, silence.

"Are we not going to get out?" said Mignon in surprise, as they still went swiftly on.

"Not to-day," said Adam.

"After all," she said, "the sooner we leave here, the sooner we shall get the letters!"

Leaving the Bois by a different outlet, they came ere long to a more crowded part of the city, where, as Adam knew, the traffic would render it difficult for one carriage to follow another, provided the first had a good start. He gave a brief order to the driver, and the latter obeyed his instructions so well, that in a few moments there intervened between the two carriages a block of conveyances that Mr. La Mert would not find it an easy matter to pass. Presently, to Mignon's

astonishment, the driver turned sharply in at the courtyard of the Louvre.

"But the letters," she cried, "the letters!"

"You shall have them almost immediately," he said, leaping out and looking back. "Meanwhile, come, Mignon, come!"

He held out his hand, the girl put hers into it, wondering, and a little afraid; his voice recalled to her so vividly the morning when he had bade her follow him, and she had willed to stay.

"But I have seen all these things before," said Mignon, a little vexed, as they passed through the museum of ancient and modern sculpture, where men and women

> "Not yet dead,
> But in old marble ever beautiful,"

looked down upon the perishable atoms of humanity that had been coming and going, going and coming, before their eyes a thousand years and more.

Adam suddenly caught Mignon's arm and drew her behind a group of statuary that stood near. She stared at him in amazement, but he was not looking at her, but at Rideout, who had just entered, and was casting his eyes about, plainly in search of them.

He saw neither her nor Adam, and with hasty steps sprang up the stairs and vanished.

"We will go now," said Adam.

His voice and manner had suddenly changed, he looked bright and happy; his spirits rose like quicksilver at the

thought that he had shaken off his shadow, and was free, for an hour or two at least, from the consciousness of being dogged wherever he went.

"But," said Mignon, "as we are here, I should like to see the Kauffmann pictures again, and——"

"To-morrow," said Adam, hurrying on. "Here is the carriage; jump in, Mignon, quick!"

Puzzled and bewildered, Mignon took her place, Adam sprang in beside her, the driver cracked his whip, they were off!

CHAPTER III.

"What! frighted with false fire?"

MIGNON had received her letter, and after tearing it open with her usual eagerness, had been met by the customary disappointment. Adam, too, had got several letters; but after glancing at, and frowning over the first of the batch, he had thrust them all into his pocket, resolved to permit nothing to cast a shadow upon the brightness of these hours that he somehow felt to be stolen.

But now, as he stands with his wife under the roof of Nôtre-Dame, his mood changes, he grows thoughtful; while something of the feeling of the man who wrote in energetic doggrel of the glories of Niagara—

"When standing under the Horse-shoe Fall
Didn't it look great? di In't I look small?"

steals into Mignon's mind. She has never consciously measured herself in any way, by any standard, but now it is suddenly borne in upon her what an insignificant petty speck she is.

She has it not in her thoughts that some day she will describe with her unskilled fingers, or inartistic tongue, her impressions of this vast and superb cathedral, therefore she strikes no attitudes indicative of an enormous amount of appreciation, combined with a totally inadequate power of receptivity; nor does she gaze exhaustively at the roof, the floor, the whole magnificent *coup d'œil*, then fall to taking notes.

An old-young lady standing near, who is attired with the usual stern economy of the British female, when she goes abroad, is going through all these evolutions, but Mignon stands hushed and solemn, feeling (as she has never before felt under vault made by human hands) that here one might look up, up, and see heaven shining through the apparently illimitable distance above. Involuntarily she has clutched at Adam's hand, like a frightened child, and holds it fast, while he, who has seen it all before, is seeing it all over again in the girl's beautiful startled eyes, in the quiver of her proud sensitive lips, in the colour that comes and goes in her cheeks. . . .

After all, he says to himself, he has not quite sounded the depths or mastered the intricacies of his young wife's heart.

There are men and women who live and die without understanding, who go through life with unseeing eyes, unhear-

ing ears, who are never conscious of the treasures strewn in their path, whose insensibility to noble influences is so profound, that they are not so much as aware that they lack the divine spark that will kindle the soul into life, and turn the commonest things on earth to beauty.

Adam rejoiced when he saw how this girl, whom no one could reckon wise, and who by some might be counted as frivolous and shallow, was blessed by Heaven with the possession of "the seeing eye."

Loosing her hand from Adam's, Mignon paused before that marvellous piece of sculpture that represents a man half lifting himself from his open coffin, ghastly, trembling, nerveless, with the sweat of exhaustion on his brow, the foretaste of the tortures of the damned in his blank and awful eyes, and the secrets of the charnel-house locked within those frozen lips . . . imperishable record of a story so supernatural and romantic as to haunt the memory of him who hears it for many a day.

Wandering unconsciously from the place where they had stood together, Mignon all at once discovered Adam to be no longer by her side. It is easily accomplished, a separation in an unknown place; one false step to the right or to the left, and each effort to retrace it results in setting the seekers farther and farther from each other.

Mignon, however, made no very diligent search after her companion, and presently she found herself once more at the entrance to the cathedral, and there was the old *cocher* fast asleep on the box, as usual.

The day had become oppressively hot; the pavement was burning; the air was close and still; and Mignon looked about her, seeking some shady place in which to seat herself and wait for Adam's appearance. Not being able to find the desired haven, she strolled round the cathedral, to see how it looked from the outside, and as the last flutter of her dress vanished, the *cocher* opened one of his sleepy old eyes, and recognised her. Somebody else, too, at a considerable distance, and scarcely believing in his good fortune, hastened forward in pursuit. Following her fancy, the girl came to a promenade planted with trees, and adorned in the centre with a fountain that ought to have been playing, but was not; a few *bonnes* in charge of children were sitting there, knitting and gossiping; half-a-dozen soldiers in their ugly red and blue coats, and wonderful nether garments, were standing about; some market-women were passing by, in their homely, thrifty attire, and clean close white caps.

Wandering idly on, and amused by the various groups as she passed, Mignon came out upon an odd-looking, low white building, which attracted her attention in the first place by its extreme ugliness, and in the second by the number of men, women, and children who were pouring in and out of it. They seemed to be for the most part artisans, and quite poor people, although a few carriages waited without. Grown used to the open air and free exhibitions of Paris, Mignon drew nearer, stepped over the threshold and entered.

At first she could make out nothing. Whatever show

there might be was in some place beyond, for the outcoming people jostled her in the narrow entrance. And then she began to wonder why all these people looked at her so strangely, why a whisper suddenly passed from lip to lip, while one or two men put up their hands as if to stay her progress.

She was so young, so childish-looking, moreover, her beauty was of so gay a character, that one would have taken her to be on her way to some joyous spectacle, some comely, pleasant sight—"therefore," muttered these poor people, "what did she here?"

She was *Anglaise*, it was true, and that would account for a good deal, but did these English ladies go in such careless, happy fashion to seek a lost father, brother, or sweetheart?

Another step or two, and, no one hindering her, she found herself in a large and shabby room, a portion of which was shut off by a high glass partition.

This transparent wall was lined by a row of persons who gazed in silence at some object or objects that lay beyond. Facing her as she entered was a whitewashed wall, upon which hung, in straight formal folds, like headless imitations of pinioned bodies, a strange collection of garments, for the most part ragged, but all soiled and discoloured.

Mignon, looking about in perplexity, yet with a certain sense of excitement and anticipation, for her curiosity was thoroughly aroused, stepped lightly towards the glass wall, with its fringe of absorbed human beings.

An old woman, hardened in sin and sorrow, with a heart that had outlived all sympathy with human misery, turning and seeing that unconscious, blooming face behind her, suddenly, with the instinct that prompts one to rescue a child who wanders blindfold into danger, lifted her hand and waved the girl back. But Mignon, understanding nothing, and disregarding that kindly warning, pressed nearer, and looking over the woman's shoulder through the glass beyond, beheld—this.

Upon a black marble slab, immediately below her eyes, was stretched the body of a young girl partially covered by a rude board. The limbs were bare, but the bosom was shrouded by a veil of rich wet brown hair, over which a small stream of water flowed sluggishly.

The face—O God! the face on which the stiffness of death had already settled, whose was it—whose?

Could those heavy-lidded eyes lift their glance to Mignon's, would they not be revealed as richly brown as that veil of dripping hair?

Could those silent lips utter sound, would they not shriek, "Gabrielle! Gabrielle!"

Those little feet that lay so still and quiet, had they not trodden the self-same path from early childhood that the living ones yonder had pressed, and being parted by the cruel intervention of fate, and set upon divergent paths, had they at last again met together—thus?

Mignon's dull brain did not turn, her tongue did not cry aloud, her numb heart was pulseless and still as that of the piteous drowned thing yonder, as she withdrew her eyes

from it and looked at the only other occupant of the enclosure. A man in the meridian of his strength and early manhood, upon whose brow death had set an untroubled serene majesty it had never known in life, that never indeed comes to any man until he has tasted of the fruit of the immortals, nor is ever seen upon his face in the hour of his most unalloyed content.

Mignon's eyes travelled slowly back to the form that lay before her.

"Muriel . . ." she said in a whisper, "Muriel . . . I cannot get to you—see, there is this glass between us, and I can't . . . I can't . . .

"Why are you here, my darling?" she went on monotonously, "with all these people staring in upon you . . . are you asleep? I have waited for you so long, but now I have found you . . ."

On either side the people had fallen away before her, staring and wondering, as she leaned her brow against the glass talking, or (as those who listened expressed it) gibbering quietly to herself.

"Muriel! Muriel!" she went on imploringly, and then her voice changed, and there fell from her lips a snatch of the old talismanic song:

"Cherry ripe, cherry ripe, ripe, I cry;
Full and fair ones, come and buy.
Come and buy . . ."

She broke off, put up her hand to her head, gazed uncertainly on the faces around her . . . heard one woman say

to another, "Is she mad? To be talking—to be singing—to the dead?"

She caught the word, and the unknown nameless dread took shape, substance, and reality in terrible conviction.

In that supreme moment, and seeing that all power of expression, by word or deed, was denied to her, it may be that the poor overtasked and tottering brain would have turned, had not help arrived—help under strange guise, from a strange hand!

Some one grasped her wrist suddenly and firmly, a voice urgent and wild cried, "Come away, Mignon! come away!"

Turning, she saw close to her own a face that seemed familiar to her, yet knew not whose it was, or where or when she had last beheld it.

And the new comer, as he looked into her blank blue eyes, at her lips, drawn convulsively back from the clenched teeth, at the face from whence every trace of youth and tenderness had departed, might well believe himself to be in the presence of one who, in the first measureless dread and wonder of an awful, and hitherto unimagined sight, had been turned to stone, each feature frozen into the expression it had taken on the first lightning-stroke of revelation.

"Do you know what is there?" she said in a whisper, the power of speech returning to her, and pointing with her lifted forefinger at the glass; "do you know who it is, I say?"

"Yes, yes," he said, looking only at her, "I know—only

come away, Mignon—such sights as these are enough to kill you—come!"

"No," she said calmly; "you cannot know, or you would not talk of my coming away . . . I heard some one say she was . . . dead . . ." she went on, pressing nearer to him, and gazing at him with her beautiful wild eyes, "but it is not possible that it is true, only there is a look upon her face . . . a look . . . that I never saw on Muriel's face before . . ." He dropped her hand as though it were an adder that had stung him.

"Muriel? . . ." he stammered out, "whom do you know of that name? Why do you use it . . . why . . ."

Of all names under heaven there could not be to him a more terrible one uttered by Mignon's lips than this.

"She is there," said the girl, still in that slow, terrible whisper, and pointing again at the glass.

"Muriel in there!" he said, pale as ashes, and taking a step back. "What are you saying, Mignon . . . and what is Muriel to you?"

"She was my life," said Mignon wildly, "but now she is . . . see!" she cried, and snatched his hand and pulled him forwards. She remembered not that this man had once been her lover, she knew only that she had found her sister, found her . . . thus.

Instantaneous as had been her gesture, thought with him had been more rapid still. "There are more Muriels than one in the world"—had flashed through his mind in that moment's space.

And then, compelled by her, he looked—looked, and re-

coiling violently, covered his face with his hands, as though he would shut out from his eyes, as from his thoughts, the sight that confronted him.

The crowd shrugged its shoulders in contemptuous wonder. What were these English people making such ridiculous fuss about? First the girl, then the man—bah! One would think they had neither of them ever seen a corpse in their lives before; and what was there to be afraid of, pray, in those two wholesome pleasant corpses yonder? Sometimes, to be sure, there were spectacles here calculated to give timid people a turn, but to-day, why there was nothing, absolutely nothing!

"You are sorry?" said Mignon gently, finding it but natural that his agitation should be excessive, for was not that dead Muriel—

"The sweetest flower of all the field—"

and how should any one look upon that spectacle unmoved?

"I thought she was asleep," said Mignon, "but she is dead . . . quite dead . . . and in her hand there is no flower, and she always bade us, when she should die, to rain them down upon her lips, and brow, and breast, and all of white . . . pure white . . ."

"Come away!" cried Philip La Mert hoarsely, lifting his face from the hands that were powerless as the glass before him to shield what lay beyond from his consciousness.

Even as he did so, the dreadful fascination that ever drags our eyes to the sight that is the most heartrending the whole

world can afford to us, impelled him to look again at the object before him.

Something—what was it?—suddenly arrested that glance, transforming it to a keen and collected scrutiny. Feature by feature, line by line, slowly and carefully as a painter who scans his work, Philip La Mert examined the lineaments and form of the drowned girl before him.

Then a change came over him. The colour rushed back to his cheeks, the light to his eyes, as, throwing back his arms with a gesture of relief, and expanding his chest, he said, "It is not Muriel!"

CHAPTER IV.

"When devils will their blackest sins put on,
They do suggest it first with heavenly show."

THERE are times when we accept human words as though they were sent straight from heaven; it does not even occur to us to question them; and the occasion of Philip La Mert's making the above remarkable speech was one of them. Mignon looked in his face and knew.

Then, the shock of joy being more than she could bear, her brain reeled, and she fell at his feet. He was powerless to raise her, he himself staggered as he stood . . . lawless and extravagant in all his emotions, he had during the past few moments been possessed successively by the most powerful and irresistible passions that sway mankind.

The intensest love that a man can know, the profoundest

remorse that the human heart can experience . . . these were the opposing currents that had met in shock so fearful that it was matter for small marvel if brain and soul bent beneath the strain imposed upon it, and that he was, in the whirlwind of conflicting sensations, as one from whom his wits have been stolen by wine.

A hasty step, a parting of the staring, gesticulating crowd, and Adam appeared, his eyes taking in, with one lightning-glance, the *tableau* before him.

His wife stretched, insensible, at the feet of her former lover . . . that lover gazing down upon her, wild, disordered, pale as she, with love, horror, and a nameless something that was not, yet touched nearly upon, despair.

For a moment the sight arrested the husband's steps—for a moment there flashed in his eyes the ominous gleam that had been there on his wedding morning,—then, advancing, he kneeled down, and lifting in his arms the little quiet, helpless figure, he carried her out of the building.

He called for water, and after a slight delay, some one brought it. Not for long, however, lasted Mignon's first lapse of consciousness. With a gasping sob and sigh, she opened her eyes, her hand wandered upwards in bewilderment to her brow, she moved her head from side to side, and looked around.

At that moment, a young man in the dress of an artisan pushed his way roughly through the crowd, and with hurried steps entered the place they had just quitted. A moment later, a sharp quick cry was heard within, then silence followed.

Not Adam, not Mignon, only he himself was beginning to understand; beginning to see the light shining beyond the distant mountain-tops, to feel that the wrong was turning to right, that for him as for others, there was a place among the workers in the great scheme of life.

Adam too was silent—those words of Mignon's were Greek to him, totally ignorant as he was of all that had gone before. What could he think but that she had been speaking to Philip La Mert of her sister? . . . That she should betray to this man, this almost stranger, the blot on her name which he himself endured, yet never forgot, enraged him, and for the first time the childish innocence that he had so loved in the girl, appeared to him almost in the light of a misfortune to herself, a sin against him.

He was unaware of any cause that should have stretched her unconscious at Philip La Mert's feet, and afterwards have drawn her from her husband's arms to Philip La Mert's side, save that she loved him, had loved him all along, although she might not have fully realised the fact until she experienced the shock of meeting him again.

Was he perpetually (he asked himself) to assist at these unseemly and degrading scenes?

Without a word he took Mignon's hand (she was not heeding him, to the last her eyes were fixed upon Philip,) and led her to the carriage that was waiting.

Speech was impossible to him; a demon had broke loose and was working wild havoc in his breast; broad daylight though it was, he could scarcely see to guide his own and Mignon's footsteps.

She, too, could not speak; she was exhausted by the alternate agony and relief that had so rapidly succeeded each other. Yet it had been well if she could have spoken ere he turned away, if she could have removed from his mind the impression that the events of the past five minutes had burned in on it.

Having placed Mignon in the carriage, Adam paused a moment, regained command over his voice, told the driver to wait, and retraced his steps to the spot where Philip La Mert still stood.

The eyes of the two men met.

"Mr. La Mert," said Adam quietly, "it has pleased you to follow my wife to Paris, to dog her footsteps wherever she may go, and finally to force yourself upon her so soon as you discovered her to be alone, and deprived of my protection.

"I have to ask you whether it be your intention to persist in the prosecution of this unmanly pursuit, also—for I imagine that you have some ultimate views—what may be the end that you propose to yourself?"

"My intentions were," said Mr. La Mert slowly, "to follow her and you—wherever you might go—to the world's end if needs were, but to be always at your elbow, you, whom I counted to be the thief that had, in my absence, stolen that which I believed to be all my own.

"I purposed to watch and wait, sooner or later to get speech with her, to arouse in her breast a feeling of contempt for you, of pity for me (she has a very tender and pitiful heart); the rest I left to time, my own patience and

cunning and the devil's help, believing that I should win her away from you, back to me, at last. I would have kept the oath I swore to her when first I had speech with her—that if any other man stole her from me, I would move heaven and earth to regain her.

"You love her, therefore you are able to comprehend something of the loss I have sustained: and I love her too—as I have loved her from the first day I saw her innocent face; as I shall love her to the day of my death."

"Enough," said Adam sternly, "of your past intentions—what are your present ones?"

"To abandon my pursuit of her, at once and for ever. To love her indeed, but with a love that shall be no disgrace to her, no occasion for reproach to myself, to be her true and faithful friend always, if ever occasion place it in my power to do her some such service as a brother might—these are my present resolves—not intentions."

He paused a moment, his eyes travelling past Adam to the infinite peace and beauty of the cloudless vault of heaven, then went on again.

"Also, to retrieve a past injury, to bring such peace as I may, to a heart that has through me made harsh acquaintanceship with sorrow . . . no matter that in the so doing I condemn myself to a companionship that is the symbol of a sinful and unhappy past—even as your Mignon was to me the embodiment of a pure and hopeful future."

Mr. La Mert paused again, and Adam, regarding him with a keen and unwavering scrutiny, asked himself, was this man

mad enough to expect him to accept so astounding a declaration?

No longer ago than last night had Philip La Mert silently flung down the gage of defiance at his feet—not one hour ago had he been pursuing Mignon—how, then, came in a moment this miraculous conversion? Adam's silence, his glance, instantly informed the other of the incredulity that filled his mind.

"I cannot expect you to understand," said Philip, with a heightening of colour, and a momentary return to his former bearing, "neither can I explain—my future actions will speak for me; but I swear to you, as between man and man, and in the sight of God, that henceforth your wife is sacred to me, and that never by thought, word, or deed, will I violate my vow. You believe me?"

"I do," said Adam. In spite of himself, the accent of truth in the voice of the other carried an irresistible conviction to his mind.

The day was not far distant when these words of Philip La Mert were to recur to Adam as the veriest inspiration of the Father of Lies.

* * * * *

"There is one point," said Adam, after a short pause, "on which an explanation is due to you from me. When I found that you were paying your suit to Miss Ferrers, I protected her against you by every means in my power, for I had, as I believed, ample proof that you were not free to woo her to be your wife. Believing this, I caused to be conveyed to her the fact that you were married."

"And yet," exclaimed Philip, frowning and looking downwards, "it is strange that, knowing something of me, you should not have heard all the circumstances—it is a very well-known story. At the time I first saw and loved Miss Ferrers," he went on, "I was practically a single man; my divorce suit, to which there could be but one issue, was then pending. As soon as the decree was pronounced, I purposed asking Mignon to be my wife. Not wishing her to be insulted by any knowledge of the disgraceful affair, I made myself known to her, not under the name of La Mert, but of Rideout, my second name. Well, you have won—I have lost her . . . and her loss sets me free to do an act of reparation that I could not have done had she been mine, not yours . . . it may be that the day will come when I shall be grateful to you that you saved her from me . . . but not now . . . not now . . ."

He controlled himself by a violent effort, and went on again.

"I have one question to ask of you. Your wife exhibited excessive agitation at sight of a—body" (he shuddered) "in yonder building, that seemed to bear an extraordinary resemblance to some one whom she called—Muriel!"

The words left his lips in strange, unwilling fashion, as though it were a name familiar, yet terrible.

"What!" cried Adam, stepping back in horror. "You were not in time to prevent her seeing the ghastly sights of that place?"

"No," said Philip, looking down, "I was not in time . . when I got there she seemed to be on the very verge of

madness. . . . She was gibbering and talking to a poor drowned creature before her, whom she called—Muriel!"

"Good God!" cried Adam, striking his forehead with his clenched hand. "What a brute—what a madman I have been!—to take so little care of her as to let her run the chance of such a fearful shock—when I have been so careful, too, to keep from her knowledge that there was any such place in Paris——"

For the first time his eyes turned towards the pale and wistful face in the distance that had looked in wonder at him many times, but to which La Mert's glance (although he knew all too well just where she was) had not once wandered.

"That there should be anything so fatal, so incredible," went on Adam vehemently, "that she should see a chance resemblance like that—to the creature in whom her very life is bound up——" He paused abruptly, struck, through all the excitement that possessed him, by the expression of Philip La Mert's face.

"And that other?" asked Philip breathlessly; "who is she . . . what was she to . . . your wife?"

"They are sisters," said Adam.

Recoiling before the speaker, holding up his arms as though to ward off some imminent and frightful danger, while beads of sweat gathered and stood upon his brow—

"It is false . . ." Philip said, in a low, hoarse whisper, "false . . . that they two . . . O God! . . . they two . . . out of all women upon earth should be . . . sisters . . . it is monstrous . . . incredible, I say. . . ."

Then he turned as one who flees from Nemesis, and mingling with the crowd, was lost to sight in a moment.

CHAPTER V.

"Enchantment
Grew drunken, and would have its head and bent."

MIGNON and her husband were standing on the summit of the Arc de Triomphe, looking down on the magical scene spread out below. Probably from this eminence alone is one able to appreciate in all its magnificence the central idea that governs the architecture of Paris, and exalts it, on mere æsthetic grounds alone, above every other city in the world.

Mignon, gazing on the numberless lines of light that radiated, like the jewelled spokes of some gigantic, dazzling wheel, from every side of the building on which she stood, upon the myriad lamps that trembled over the vast expanse, as though, indeed, the great armies of the heavens had scattered their fire over the breast of the city,—for a brief space forgot her misery, even as she forgot herself, in the ineffable splendour of the night.

Presently she shivered, then crept a little nearer to her husband, and looking anxiously up into his face, "Adam," she said, "I have been thinking . . . and do you know that it is all so much more hopeful than I thought at first; and it seems to me that if I only wait, and am quite patient, it

will come right at the last. . . . And I will be patient . . ." she added with a half-sob, "and brave. I will never give up again as I did yesterday . : . only when I saw that . . ." (her hands clasped his arm more tightly) "so like, so fearfully like, I did not think I could ever pray again . . . everything seemed to be over, done with . . . and it all rose up before me like a vision, all that she must have suffered, all that she must have gone through, ere she came to be lying there so still and quiet, with the water trickling over her dead face. . . . And even now, when I know that it was not Muriel, I still can't keep it out of my head that perhaps Muriel is enduring all that the poor creature I saw endured, ere she found death at last. . . . And yet it is a foolish fancy, is it not?" she said, looking up into her husband's face with a wistful, tender smile, that made his heart ache for her. "This afternoon," she went on, "I took courage to read Miss Sorel's letter over again, for the first time since that terrible day when I got news of my darling . . . and I found in it a different meaning to the one that it had for me before; yes, I saw quite clearly that it was possible, even likely, that Miss Sorel had been mistaken, for all that she was so wise and good—for do you not say yourself that no one can look into another person's mind, the most that one can do is to guess at it?"

Adam, his head turned away from the piteous scrutiny of her blue eyes, murmured some inarticulate reply.

"And so it came to me," said the girl, "all of a sudden, that Miss Sorel had been quite wrong in her notion about Muriel, that after all there might be some explanation that

catch a glimpse of him, as we shall not be going away yet awhile."

"But I thought you were in such a hurry to get back to Lilytown; it was only yesterday morning that you said——"

"Only, you see," she said, interrupting him, "I did not know what was going to happen—that I should see him——"

Now, if there be any parallel to the extraordinary and perverse dislike that a woman has to being called a woman, it is that of the objection a man has to hearing his wife or sweetheart speak of any one under the sun, save himself, as him.

Adam drew his hand suddenly out of his wife's clasp. He was angry—worse still, he had lost patience; but he was too thoroughly manly to vent his irritation on this girl, who had so great a claim upon his love and forbearance.

She looked at him in surprise, not knowing in what way she had displeased him. . . . Her innocence had its drawbacks; had she possessed experience, she would have discovered the rock of offence, and in future steered clear of it. Only in that case she would not have been the Mignon that he loved. Well, men are hard to please, and they expect utterly irreconcilable qualities.

"Mignon," he said a moment later, in his usual tone, "I have some good news for you that I received this morning; and yet it is almost inhuman to say that it is good, although Mr. Sorel is your enemy——"

"What of him?" cried Mignon breathlessly; then, suddenly sobered, "he is not—dead?" she said.

"No—not dead; but grief and excitement have so worked upon him as to render him insane."

"Then there is no chance," cried Mignon, clasping her hands in despair, "of our ever getting Rosemary. You said it was not likely that he would wish to retain the house, and that by setting an agent to watch, and giving him instructions to take the house in his own name and transfer it to you afterwards, Mr. Sorel would never suspect we had got it; but now——"

"But now," said Adam, "the thing has passed beyond possibilities, Mignon—it is done. Mr. Sorel's next-of-kin, a shrewd man of business, without a trace of romance in his composition, upon whom devolved the task of settling all Mr. Sorel's affairs, when he found from Prue how matters lay, that Miss Sorel had kept the school against her brother's wishes, and from the landlord that the lease had expired in June, but was to have been renewed on Miss Sorel's return, simply declined committing any such folly in the existing state of Mr. Sorel's health, placed the matter in the hands of the very agent I had put to watch, accepted a sum for fixtures, caused all personal belongings of Miss Sorel to be removed to the How, and the whole thing is settled. I have written to town to have certain things sent in to make the place comfortable, and we will set out, if you are ready, Mignon, the day after to-morrow."

She did not immediately speak—she was dumb with joy; but she took both his hands between both her own, and kissed them passionately.

"To be able to watch and wait for her always, like that!"

she said; "to be sure of never missing her, come when she will, by night or day; and it is all your doing—all. . . . You are good," she said, with almost a sob in her voice, "and I am not worthy of you, though indeed, indeed I will try to be. . . ."

"Do not!" he cried almost harshly, as he took her in his arms; "do you hear me? I forbid it, Mignon—only try, is it so very hard a thing, sweetheart, to love me?"

She shrank from his embrace, his words; it was not often that he permitted himself the folly of either. "Love" was a word that he had hitherto been shy of using with the girl, and now he said to himself that he had been mad to use it; she would be scared and ill at ease with him. He knew also that when the first seedling shoot of that which in time should become a stately flower begins to stir in the warm brown earth, it is folly indeed to seize and drag it into daylight, seeking to wrest from it its yet unborn perfume. Yet it was difficult not to believe that the germ developed but slowly, slowly—nay, there were times when he doubted if it were there at all; and, in that case, how weary would be the waiting for that which could never come!

"And now we will go home and begin to pack up," said Mignon feverishly, and turning to depart without one backward look at the magnificent panorama that had but now so electrified her; "only," she added, stopping short as though a thought had suddenly struck her, "we shall not have many chances of seeing Mr. La Mert again if we go the day after to-morrow; nevertheless, it is more than possible that we shall run up against him some day in Lilytown!"

As she began the descent from the summit of the arch, she looked once more like the joyous, happy-hearted girl of a month ago.

CHAPTER VI.

> "There's not a breath
> Will mingle kindly with the meadow air,
> Till it has panted round and stolen a share
> Of passion from the heart!"

"O, PRUE!" cried Mignon, as she jumped out of the carriage straight into Prue's arms, "it is worth all, all the disagreeableness of getting married and going away, to come back to you and Rosemary again!"

"Hush, Miss Mignon!—I beg pardon, ma'am," said Prue, with a hasty glance at Mr. Montrose; but, reassured by his unruffled countenance, she added, "O, it's glad I am to see your bonnie face again!" She held the girl away from her, regarding her with fondest love and pride, "Long and dreary the time has been without you!"

"Prue," said Mignon solemnly, as they went along the familiar approach to the house together, "are you quite sure that we've not all been dreaming? Do you know," she grew pale and stopped short, "that I cannot help fancying I have been away for the holidays, and that I shall find her standing just inside the door?"

"No, no, Miss Mignon," said Prue sadly; "you'll just see two new maids, for cook left a while ago, and there's a bit change in the house."

And indeed, when Mignon stepped over the threshold, she found that all was not just as it used to be.

From the school window had for ever disappeared the dismal wire blind, that had been the despair of the young and idle male population of Lilytown, and in its place hung curtains of crimson silk and white lace, while through the open window came the perfume of roses and mignonette. Prue's careful fingers had also arranged nosegays wherever she could find a place to set them, for did she not know how her little mistress loved flowers?

The coloured maps still hung on the wall, in one corner of the room stood the globe over which her weary fingers had travelled so many, many times; but the desks, forms, and blackboard had disappeared, to make place for such pleasant, handsome furniture as beseemed the dining-room of a gentleman who was bringing home his young wife. She ran into the drawing-room: that was also a curious mixture of past and present; for though the bunch of painted flowers still hung upon the wall, and Diana was busy blowing an imaginary horn in the distance, some good fairy had turned the chilly room into a bower of blue and white, that must have been specially chosen, one would say, with regard to the character of Mignon's beauty.

She was standing in the middle of the room, herself the prettiest thing in it, so thought Adam, who was silently watching her from the doorway, when she spied him and ran forward.

"You like it?" he said simply, smoothing her hair away from her blue eyes.

"Yes," she said softly, "I like it." One little fluttering hand stole timidly up and rested on his breast, then, standing on tiptoe, she lifted her lips to his, with as light, as kind, as affectionate a kiss, as though he had been her brother or her father.

"And indeed I like you," she said heartily. "I think I grow to like you better and better every day; in time I do believe I shall get almost as fond of you as I am of Prue!"

His arms slackened their hold upon her; she stood alone.

"And when she comes," continued Mignon, looking about her with a beaming countenance of utter delight, "how happy we shall be, to be sure!"

"And until then?" he said quietly.

O!" she said, her face falling somewhat, "I have not thought much about it; but with so much to look forward to, we can't be very dull, can we?"

When, half-an-hour later, Adam found himself seated at one end of the table, and Mignon, in a fresh muslin gown with a rose in her belt at the other, he said to himself that he was an ingrate to fortune, in that he received her favours with such scant thanks. Only to think that Mignon was there; that she would be at his table always; that whenever he came home, this little shape would be within reach of his glance; that he would never more be tormented by stolen and hasty peeps; that for to-day, to-morrow, for ever, she was safely his wife, unloving may be, but still his own!

"Mignon," said Adam, when the servant had finally left the room, "has it ever occurred to you that I have a father?"

"No," she said, "I have never thought about it"—and it was true. In the selfish isolation of her sorrow she had thought but little of Adam, still less of his belongings.

Adam left his place and sat down beside her.

"And have you never heard, Mignon," he said seriously, "that sometimes fathers do not like their sons to marry, especially when the sons have not asked their advice?"

"Is he angry?" said Mignon, in some dismay. "Will he come round here and scold us?"

"He is far too dignified to scold," said Adam, laughing, "but I expect he will be—angry."

"Let us go and ask him to forgive us," said Mignon, promptly, "and I will tell him how it all happened, and that it was every bit my fault. He couldn't possibly blame you for it!"

"Poor little sinner!" said Adam gently, "you will make a great confession of misdeeds, will you not, and I shall stand quietly by and listen to you. Meanwhile I had better prepare him gently. So in half an hour's time, Mignon, I shall go and tell him."

"And then will he come and see me?" said Mignon, laying one hand on Adam's arm. "Do you think that he will say wicked—things, as that other old man did?"

"Good heavens, no!" said Adam in horror. "And do not fear," he added, "but that I shall know how to protect my own. I shall take you to see him to-morrow morning—when you will also make the acquaintance of—Flora."

"But you said she was married?"

"So she is."

"And does she live with your father?"

"She is paying him a visit."

"With her husband?"

"Yes—Colin is there."

His voice took that tone which one man never uses in speaking of another, unless he heartily likes him.

"And she is quite young?" said Mignon.

"Let me see," said Adam. "She was married at eighteen, and Taffy must be eight years old by now—I suppose she is somewhere about seven-and-twenty."

"Then she is quite old," said Mignon, disconsolately; "only two years younger than you are! Is she pretty?"

"Some people think so."

"And good-tempered?"

"So her admirers say."

"But," said Mignon, blankly, "I did not know that when people were married they had admirers!"

"Do they not?" he said, looking keenly at the girl; "well, I suppose Flora is an exception to the rule, for she has several!"

"And are you very fond of her?" said Mignon, puzzled by a certain hardness in his manner.

"I am not fond of her at all."

"Not fond of her?" cried Mignon, staring at him; "your own sister, the only one you have—just the same to you as Muriel is to me?"

"No," said Adam, "I am not fond of her; on the contrary——" he threw his head back and looked ceilingwards

half-ruefully, half-impatiently, "I am afraid there cannot be the smallest doubt in the world that I do not like her at all!"

CHAPTER VII.

"With unladen breasts,
Save of blown self-applause, they proudly mount
To their spirit's perch, their being's high account;
Their tip-top nothings, their dull skies, their thrones."

"Now then!" said Flora, "put your hands behind your backs, and for your lesson to-day, learn that:

"'A frog he would a-wooing go,
Whether his mother would let him or no,
Heigho! says Roly.'"

Two childish voices repeated the ancient nursery classic with a readiness that would have been laudable and surprising, had they now uttered it for the first time.

Their mother broke into a sudden peal of laughter. Her laughter was like herself, abundant; for nature had not found herself skimped for material when she created Flora. No, nor for colour, for though all about her was a great blaze of scarlet, yellow, and blue flowers, her own tints were every whit as vivid as theirs.

"There is," says a famous French writer, "but one way in which a woman can be handsome, but a hundred thousand ways in which she can be pretty." This being translated, means, I take it, that the beauty of extreme youth, a joyous mood, a becoming gown, the neighbourhood of a favoured

admirer, or any other pleasurable emotion, is able to transform a plain woman into a pretty one.

Flora's good looks in no way depended on any of the adventitious aids before enumerated; nevertheless, it was a fact that she just missed being extremely handsome, through the one feature of the face that is so often the stumbling-block over which female beauty trips—the nose.

Lovely eyes are plentiful as blackberries, lovelier perhaps among the humble ones of the earth than the great; cherry lips are as often to be met with as the pretty fools to whom they would seem to especially belong, but—a handsome nose! So far as my own experience goes, I have never discovered a phenomenon of this kind, save on the faces of one or two intensely irritable people.

Flora would have cheerfully parted with one of her own plump fingers, if by so doing she could have made that little disdainful nose of hers straight.

There was about this young matron a bold, gay *bonhomie*, that might be no more than a mere animal delight in existence, the outcome of a pleasure-loving temperament, but, on the other hand, might be no less an admirable quality than solid goodness of heart. Complexion, constitution, and digestion alike precluded the possibility of Flora's being persistently ill-humoured, and to do her justice, she seldom was, unless admiration and attention were diverted on their way to her by a skilful sister bandit. Nevertheless, on occasion she was capable of entertaining for certain people a strong dislike, and of these persons her brother Adam was one. Her nerves, too, were excellent, enabling her to bear the dis-

"There is no knowing what Adam will do when once he takes an idea into his head," said his sister. "So that he himself is satisfied, he will not care a button what you or I or anybody else may think of the matter."

Not often did Flora venture to make so bold a speech as the foregoing, and now she glanced from under her long eyelashes to see how it told.

Mr. Montrose was irritably glancing across to where, in dim perspective, that trim and well-stocked kitchen garden in which Adam had dug, and delved, and accomplished his destiny, was visible.

"Your brother is his own master," he said stiffly; "owing to your departed mother's injudicious bequest to him, he is in no way dependent upon me, and although it is true I might show my displeasure by refusing to receive him and his wife, still—a family scandal"—(he made a gesture of disgust, much as though he had lighted on some noxious and disgusting insect)—"has always been my special abhorrence; besides" (here he raised his eyes to the surrounding walls), "how is it possible to be on unfriendly terms with a son who actually lives next door to you?"

"How on earth he got there is a mystery to me!" said Flora, yawning; "the servants say it is a school, or something of the kind—perhaps the schoolmistress improves the shining hour by taking in boarders while her pupils are away!"

But Mr. Montrose was not attending—for the first time in his life, he was in a dilemna.

Hitherto, he had under all circumstances been equally

pleased and satisfied with himself in all that he had done, and since he was never called upon to fill any situation with which his previous experiences did not enable him to deal, he had been saved from even the mere suspicion of the barrenness of his resources.

Now, suddenly confronted by an unexpected exigency, he was at a loss, and in this disagreeable revelation to himself of his helplessness and incapacity, felt an added cause of resentment against its occasion As a Roman father denouncing his offspring in well-rounded periods, and enunciating highly moral sentiments from a lofty height of virtue, Mr. Montrose would have been in his element; he would even have figured handsomely as the stately yet condescending parent who received a privileged and duly approved daughter-in-law into his bosom; but as a parent who disliked a match concerning which he was yet by circumstances compelled to spare the thunders of his righteous indignation, he felt himself in a false position, from whence he knew not how to extricate himself with dignity.

"And Miss McClosky is coming here to day!" he said at last. "A most estimable young woman who would have suited him in every way, who is, so far as her maidenly modesty permits one to judge, by no means indifferent to your brother, and to whom, if I am not much mistaken, this news will come with as great a shock as it does to us."

"Poor Phillis!" said Flora, not unkindly, "I wish she had not been coming; it would have been so much better to write and tell her; but unless at the eleventh hour some accident happens to prevent her—she will come!"

Mr. Montrose put out his hands in deprecation, and resumed his measured walk.

Across the silence that had fallen between father and daughter, came the cool splash of a fountain, and the distant laughter of Taffy and Colin the Younger, who were having a good time somewhere out of sight. Although the morning was one of intolerable heat, in this corner of the garden were shade and coolness in plenty.

"They are late," remarked Flora presently, laying down her work and regarding it critically. "Doubtless the bride is arraying herself in her Sunday gown, and Adam, poor man, is doing his best to tone down the colours a little. Or, perhaps—" she paused suddenly, her lips closed, then opened again in a little quick gasp of astonishment, as she looked up and saw her brother and the girl by his side.

Here was no gardener's daughter, but a woman in whose veins ran blood as blue as her own, in whose bearing was a pride of race greater than her own, moreover, who was possessed of one supreme advantage that she herself lacked, the freshness of extreme youth.

If there was a moment of hesitation, it did not proceed from those whose province it might have been to display it, for Adam, leading Mignon forward, said, "Father, this is my wife."

Something that did not often make itself felt, stirred in the old man's selfish yet not unkindly heart, as he looked down on the girl's gentle face, and felt her slight hand close upon his. Perhaps there was more of human nature in him

than he suspected, or some thrill of healthy young life passed from her palm to his, and unconsciously freshened him, yet when he did speak, it was only to add one more to those countless billions of unanswered "How do you do's?' of which English air suffers a plethora.

"And this is my sister, Mrs. Dundas," said Adam, turning to Flora, who, with a perceptible increase of colour, had risen to greet her new sister-in-law.

"How do you do?" she said in her turn, but the meaningless words had a gay ring in them, and Mignon, turning her eyes from Mr. Montrose's uninteresting, not to say stupid countenance, to Flora's blooming, good-humoured one, was instinctively attracted towards her.

"This seat is not a large one, and I am not a small person," said Flora, laughing, "nevertheless I think that it will hold two." And with a gesture of invitation she sank into the wooden contrivance from whence she had risen.

"What a lovely garden!" said Mignon, comparing this smiling Eden with the wilderness on the other side of the wall.

"Is not yours as good?" said Flora, who was thinking, "How this chit's blue eyes will put out my grey ones!"

"No," said Mignon, "it is bare and ugly, and though I have planted lots of things, somehow they never seem to come up right!"

"Oh!" said Flora, glancing at her brother (and it was significant of the relations existing between the brother and sister that they had hitherto exchanged no greeting, "Adam

will soon change all that! He will rout the slugs, pickle the snails, and keep you in flowers and vegetables all the year round—in short, I believe that at a pinch he would not be above doing a little—weeding!"

She flashed her eyes full on Adam's (very like her own, by the way, in shape and colour, but how different in expression) with an insolence that he was not slow to appreciate; but Mignon, believing this to be an intentional allusion to a matter of which she could never think without intense shame and vexation, blushed furiously, and with the unwise impetuous courage of youth, exclaimed, "And why should he not? It is a very right thing to do, and a very kind one! And I was very much obliged to him for making those shabby old garden walks look so beautiful!"

"He did!" said Flora, opening her eyes to their utmost extent; "well, I knew Cupid did odd things sometimes, but—weeding!"

"I am not aware," said Mr. Montrose, addressing Flora in a tone of dignified rebuke, "that there is anything derogatory to a young man in the act of weeding—on the contrary, it appears to me an earnest of industry, and industry in the young is a very excellent quality. There is moreover," here he bowed gracefully towards Mignon, "a delicacy in the idea of a lover tending his mistress's flowers, a poetry in the image of him presenting her with a cluster that he has preserved from untoward influences——"

"But he wasn't a lover," said Mignon unexpectedly.

"Not a lover!" cried Flora, "and what was he then, pray?"

"I thought he was the gardener," said Mignon in an exculpatory tone.

"There!" said Flora triumphantly, "did I not always tell you so, that you looked like a gardener? After all, the nickname I gave you was well chosen!"

He glanced across at her contemptuously, then back again at his wife.

"But it was nothing to do with his looks," said Mignon hotly; "it was all my stupid mistake and—and his coming over the wall that morning."

"Over the wall!" echoed Mr. Montrose, in deepest bass tones of horror; "do I understand you to say that my son came over the wall?"

"To be sure!" said Mignon, nodding, "after snails—at least I supposed so then, as there was nothing else—only you see he found—me!"

"And may I ask," said Mr. Montrose, his countenance becoming positively vacuous under the influence of the amazement that filled him, "if my son's intrusion into your garden was the occasion of your first introduction to each other?"

"The very first!" said Mignon, nodding again. "I just asked him his name, you know, and he told me—and that's how it all happened!"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Mr. Montrose, dropping his eye-glass in a spasm of outraged decorum, "and what did your people—your father—your mother say?"

"I have no father and no mother!"

"Your nearest relatives then—your lawful guardians?"

"I haven't got any," said Mignon, sighing; "I've nobody in the world but one person and Prue—and Adam," she added, as an after-thought, glancing up at him with so cold and kind a glance, as to convince Flora that for whatever reason this mysterious and candid young lady had married Adam, it certainly was not for love.

"And who is Prue?" said Mr. Montrose; "a female relative, I presume?"

"She is a housemaid," said Mignon.

'But," said Mr. Montrose, almost gasping, "your *chaperon* at your interviews with my son—there must surely have been some one?"

"There was nobody," said Mignon, "unless"—she added meditatively, "you would call Bumble a person!"

"And who is—ah—Bumble?" said Mr. Montrose, his hopes reviving at the mention of so eminently respectable a name.

"A fowl," said Mignon; "Adam used to help me catch him."

"Is it the punishment of mine enemy, that he should marry a fool?" thought Flora, glancing at Adam, who stood, bareheaded, listening to his young wife's disclosures as calmly as though she were presenting those unwritten vouchers of respectability that society expects and demands.

"Good heavens!" said Mr. Montrose again, reverting unconsciously to the simple and forcible language that he may have used in the less distinguished and ornate days of his youth.

"Are you angry?" said Mignon, looking attentively at the

vacuous fleshy face before her; "but you must not blame Adam, for it was every bit my fault—you see, I was so lonely, and poor, and miserable, with no one but Prue to take care of me, and he married me because he was so sorry for me!"

"Not because he was sorry for you," said Adam quietly, "but because he loved you."

"So, so!" said Flora to herself, "you love her, do you, my model brother? Take care that I don't find out a way through her of paying off some very old scores."

"In my young days," said Mr. Montrose, recovering his usual stately flow of language, "it was not usual for a young woman to marry a young man because he expressed himself sorry for her—on the contrary, I may say that the whole process of courtship (resulting in matrimony) was an extremely gradual and delicate one, extending over a very considerable space of time. First came a proper and admiring regard, then a heedful and respectful approach on the part of the gentleman (with the cognizance and full approval of his family) to the lady, then a duly considered and well-digested declaration of love, followed by a period of anxious suspense on the part of the gentleman, of modest hesitation on hers, after which, if she answered him in the affirmative, there ensued a decent and enjoyable interval of courtship, and finally a marriage celebrated in the presence of the assembled relatives of the bride and bridegroom."

"Then I'm afraid," said Mignon, shaking her head with an air of conviction, "that our courtship was hopelessly wrong from beginning to end! There was no asking any-

body's permission, no suspense (I said 'Yes' the minute he asked me); and as to having a lot of relations to see us married, why we had not got one between us!"

"I don't think that you can mean that," said Mr. Montrose rebukingly. "I should be quite sorry to think that you really mean us to understand you accepted my son without a moment's hesitation; it would augur a curious lack of delicacy that I should deeply regret to discover in you. There must have been a period of hesitation, of—ah——"

He paused, the right word not having presented itself, and he being of so conscientious a turn of mind, that he would rather keep his audience waiting five minutes than affront it with one not exactly suited to the occasion.

Unfortunately, it often happens that while the proper noun, adjective, or what-not is being sought, the vagrant mind of the expectant auditor wanders, so that when Mr. Montrose had satisfied his critical taste, it was to discover that Mignon's whole attention was given to the paroquet, who had been for the last few moments viciously regarding the pink ribbons in Flora's cap, as though he meditated taking a bit out of them.

"Self-examination," said Mr. Montrose, his glance wandering from one to another, in that search of a home that is so ludicrous to the indifferent, so painful to the sympathetic observer—"self-examination," said Mr. Montrose, raising his voice a little, and growing very red in the face.

"Ha! ha! ha!" went the parrot, in an ecstasy of mirth, and, alas! whether it were the force of that godless bird's example, or the provocation of a certain something in Flora's

eye, Mignon broke into a peal of laughter that astounded Mr. Montrose as much as though she had suddenly dealt him a facetious dig in the ribs.

He began to think that there were worse things about this young person than making love over a garden wall, and saying "yes" the moment she was asked in marriage.

"I am not aware," he said majestically, "that I have said anything extraordinarily ludicrous—still I am sure I am always happy to amuse——"

So saying, and wishful to mark his sense of Mignon's impropriety by a very proper haughtiness of bearing, he stepped back a pace or two, when, alas! that little imp who ever seems to make a mock of dignities, caused him to stumble over a footstool in such wise that he found himself seated with excessive harshness on a wooden chair that stood hard by.

Even Mignon felt the occasion to be too awful for laughter, so she sat in a scarlet agony, biting her lips and puckering her forehead into a frown in her violent efforts to preserve a decent gravity; nevertheless, as Mr. Montrose glanced from her to his daughter, whose nose rested on her lace-work, and from his daughter to Adam, who had carefully turned his head away, he felt burning within him the righteous anger historically supposed to be cherished by wise men for fools.

What was there to laugh at? He would not have laughed at any one under the same circumstances; on the contrary, he would have felt and expressed sympathy. There was to him something extremely coarse in these repressed manifestations of mirth.

At this moment—and no winged Mercury of good tidings was ever more welcome—a footman noiselessly approached and handed to Flora a telegram.

She bowed in apology to Mignon, opened the missive, read, and handed it to her father.

"What an extraordinary thing," she said dryly, "Mr. McClosky has fallen ill, and can't spare his daughter!" "Has a little bird whispered the news?" she added in an aside audible only to Mignon.

"And who is Miss McClosky?" asked Mignon, presently.

"Who is she?" said Flora; "well, she is Miss McClosky! Though, if she could have had her own way, she would be somebody else!"

"But how could she be that?" said Mignon, much puzzled.

"Ask Adam!" said his sister.

Mignon looked at him, trying to understand; then all at once a light flashed upon her.

"I know!" she said, clapping her hands, "Miss McClosky was in love with Adam, or he was in love with her?"

"Yes," said Flora, grave and amused, "it was one of the two!"

"Were you very fond of her?" said Mignon to her husband, without one flicker of colour in the cool, delicate cheeks whence the blushes had long ago faded.

"But he married you, not Miss McClosky!" said Flora.

"People don't always marry the ones they like best," said Mignon, with a look in her blue eyes that struck Adam like a blow, and gave birth to fifty suspicions in Flora's busy brain.

"Now, Mignon, if you are ready, we will go," said Adam.

Mignon stood up and put her hand in Flora's.

"I hope we shall be good friends," said the latter in her hearty, ringing voice, "although we are relations, and do live on opposite sides of the wall! I won't inflict myself upon you too often, but I'll come—sometimes."

"Come often," said Mignon impressively, "come twice, three times every day if you are able, for oh! though I was dull before I was married, I am ten thousand times duller now!"

CHAPTER VIII.

"Pleasure is oft a visitant, yet pain
Clings cruelly to us like the gnawing sloth
On the deer's tender haunches."

"ARE you very busy?" asked Mignon, putting her head in at the half-opened door of the room that now went by the name of Adam's study, but retreating when she saw how he sat, his head buried in his hands, at a large table covered with books.

"I am not too busy to attend to you," he said, coming forward, and leading her in.

"Where will you sit?" he added, looking about him in some perplexity, for every chair was piled as high with dusty tomes as was the table.

"Are you doing lessons?" said Mignon, looking about her with considerable awe as she sat down on the big easy-

chair that he had swept clear of its contents and placed for her; "why I thought—I thought——"

"You thought that when a man marries he leaves off learning anything?" said Adam, laughing.

"No," she said, still looking about her, "but I had a notion, an impression, that you never did anything but gardening."

"To garden is the occupation of my leisure hours," he said; "I have periods of work as well, Mignon. Has it never occurred to you to wonder how I managed to amuse myself during the many hours a day that you are working, or gossiping with Prue?"

She looked across at him with a sudden, quick compunction—no—it had never occurred to her to wonder what he might, or might not do, so thoroughly had she been engrossed by her own thoughts, hopes, and fears.

"Has it been lonely for you," she said, "all by yourself? Do you come and read these dusty, stupid books because you have nobody to speak to? You see," she went on, drawing a little nearer, and looking at him with anxious, gentle consideration, "it is not a thing to get used to all at once—a husband, and sometimes I forget all about you! Do you know that one morning I actually got up early because I thought that it was my morning to practise before breakfast, and only when I was walking past your door, recollected I was married?"

"You will get more used to it in time," he said encouragingly, "perhaps—who knows? forget to learn your gospel and collect as you did last Saturday night, for Sunday!"

"But that was because I had taken off my wedding ring when I washed my hands, and forgotten to put it on again," said Mignon hastily; "you see it is so bright and new, and pretty, it would be a thousand pities to spoil it!"

Yes, that was what a woman's badge of life-long duty and devotion was to her, no more and no less than a pretty shining toy.

"And these books," she said, touching one of the heavy tomes before her, "what are they? geography? history? mathematics?"

"Something far more serious and disagreeable," he said, "law!"

"You are studying it?" she exclaimed, looking at him with respect; "and why do you do that?"

"Because," he said, "to live one must eat, Mignon, and to eat, costs money; and if one has not a great deal, why then one must do one's best to earn it!"

"But have you not got plenty?" said Mignon in surprise. "Do you mean to say that you have got to work for it?"

"I intend to do so," he said, "but until now, Mignon, I have been somewhat idle—indeed for two months before our marriage I never opened a book. I am afraid it will be a slow business, this making money, and that I shall be an old man before I begin to grow rich!"

"But I have got some money," said Mignon triumphantly, "and I can draw it out whenever I please; and you shall have it all, every penny of it. to do just as you like with it!"

"No, no," he said kindly; "we won't take the little woman's hoard away from her. Perhaps she'll find it useful some day, when she wants to run away from her husband."

"I know I am a great expense to you," said Mignon, not heeding his latter words, her mind anxiously bent upon her own short-comings. "And I have a very large appetite, and I bought a pair of new boots yesterday! But I won't buy any more," she added, shaking her head with immense decision; "at least, not out of your money, I'll use some of my own!"

"But I thought you were going to give it to me, Mignon?" said Adam gravely.

"So I was!" she said, looking rather chapfallen. "So I will! Only, you see, now that I know you are not very rich, I shall hate to come and ask you for so much as a penny!"

"You must try and get over that!" said Adam. "It would be such a thousand pities to touch a tremendous sum like that, Mignon! No, no, as soon as we come to the last bit of bread and meat, we will begin to draw out your hoard —a pound at a time!"

"But are we as poor as all that?" said Mignon in awe-struck tones.

"We are not rich," he said lightly, "and to beg I am ashamed—and to earn money at the bar is not easy, Mignon——"

"You are a barrister," she exclaimed, "and some day you will wear a wig and a silk gown?"

"If I live long enough," he said, laughing, "though I am afraid that the wig and gown will be the most important

part of the concern, for until a man is forty, his briefs are usually conspicuous by their absence!"

"But I thought—" she said, "I have heard Miss Sorel say, that barristers usually live in chambers—in the Temple?"

"So they do," he said; "and I have a little den of my own there. When I was eating my dinners I lived there altogether, but now that I have married a wife," he added, leaning forward and patting her cheek with his forefinger, "why, Mignon, I thought I would study at home, so had some books sent down—*voilà tout.*"

"But why did you do that?" she said. "It was a great deal of trouble, and you might have gone up as often, and stayed as long as you liked."

"In short," he said, with a touch of bitterness in his voice, "I might as well have gone—and stayed altogether, Mignon, for any difference that it would have made to you!"

"There you are mistaken!" said Mignon quickly, "for I should miss you very much indeed. Ask Prue if I did not stand at the gate a whole hour yesterday, watching for you."

"And yet, Mignon," he said, "and yet—" but he proceeded no farther in his speech.

The sweetness that is not love, the gentleness that is not affection, the sense of pleasure in a person's society that yet is not sympathy, are they not as hard to fight against as positive indifference, even dislike?

By our capacity to move people we measure our power over them, and of such power over Mignon, Adam knew that he possessed none.

About her, too, was that somewhat rare quality in a nineteenth century maiden, a "gentle hard-heartedness," such as that ascribed to Miss Austen's heroines, and which is especially difficult to overcome.

Mignon had risen, and was looking at a book before her which had opened at the title-page.

"You have a second name?" she exclaimed, "and such a pretty one too! Why do not Flora and your father call you by it?"

"My mother always did." How different was the tone in which he said "my mother," from that in which he habitually said "my father!"

"You loved her?"

"Aye!" he said, leaning his head on his hand, "home was home to me while she lived."

"And afterwards?"

"Afterwards, it was—different. My father and I had little in common, Flora and I still less; they were as uncongenial to me as I to them—they went their way, I went mine, and yet we managed to clash sometimes."

"Did Flora marry Colin for love?" said Mignon irrelevantly, her eyes wandering to the open window, through the curtains of which showed a patch of blue sky, set about by a frame of scorched Virginia creeper.

"Why do you ask?" he said.

"But did she?" persisted Mignon.

"Do wives always love their husbands?" Adam looked hard at her, then he burst out laughing. "What a couple of Quakers we are, to be sure, with our cross-

questions! If you want to know, Mignon, you must ask Flora herself—she won't hesitate to tell you the truth, and as to hurting her feelings on any point except her complexion, it's utterly impossible."

"It is very odd," said Mignon, "but though he seems so fond of her, they never go out together by any chance. He never proposes, nor does she seem to expect it."

"Colin is a wise man," said Adam, "and perhaps when you have been out once or twice with Madam Flora, you will the better understand why he permits her to take her airings alone."

"But what does she do?" said Mignon, thoroughly puzzled.

"What does she not do?" he said with much disgust. "Well, Mignon, she has asked you again and again to drive to town with her, and by my desire you have each time refused, but the next time she asks you to do so—go! And if you ever want to go with her a second time, then I am very much mistaken."

"One sees a great many people when one goes to town?" she said.

"A great many."

"One stands a good chance of meeting the people one wishes to see?"

"No, not a very good one; it is a big place, Mignon."

She was standing directly before him; she had put her hands behind her back, and was looking at him very thoughtfully.

Some emotion was working in her mind, and had brought

a faint colour to her cheek; a question trembled in her eyes, and seemed to seek the answer in his; he put out his hand and drew her towards him

"Do you think that I should be likely to run up against him there?" she said.

He started, his face changed as he said, "Of whom are you speaking?"

"Of Mr. Rideout," she said, looking surprised and rather out of breath; "of whom else should I speak?"

"There are other men in the world," said Adam; "why cannot you call him by his name?"

"Because," she said with conviction, "somehow he always has been—always will be—him to me! You see he was the first person who ever fell in love with me, he wrote me my first love-letter—and altogether I really think that if I live to be a hundred, he will always be—him!"

Adam turned abruptly, and going to the open casement, leaned far out into the garden air.

"I am nearly positive," she went on, "that he told me he was living near here, that he was constantly in and out of Lilytown—and if so, he is sure to come back sooner or later, and we are likely to meet him, are we not, somewhere or other?"

No reply.

"Though I should think it was most likely that if he were passing this way, he would come in and see us."

Adam left the window, turned and faced her.

"And does your happiness depend on your meeting this

man again?" he said sternly; "do you look forward to such a meeting with pleasure?"

"I look forward to seeing him so much," she said vehemently, "that if I thought I was going to see him this very minute I should jump for joy. There is no one on earth (save her) that I so long to see as I do to see him!"

"And you say this to me," he said in an intensely low, clear voice—"to me . . ."

"And to whom then should I say it but to you?" said the girl gently.

"Tell it to whom you will—but bring me no more of your confidences; I will have none of them. Do you hear me, Mignon? I will have none of them!"

His clenched fist came down with a crash on the table by which he stood.

She looked at him with a sudden fear and wonder in her blue eyes.

"If I may not come to you with my hopes, and thoughts, and fears," she said with simple dignity, "then there is no one else to whom I can go, for it is not to Flora, no, indeed, that I should speak of such matters. And I will not trouble you again, nor vex you with my troubles, you, who have been so good and kind to me always."

Her voice ceased in a little sob, then she turned and went quietly away, and all the sunlight and sweetness of the summer day seemed to go out with her, leaving the man who stood in the middle of the room cold and pale and weary, as one who in the battle of life flags suddenly, and weary of the rout has no longer heart or vigour to continue the strife.

CHAPTER IX.

"If you cannot inspire a woman with love of you, fill her above the brim with love of herself; all that runs over will be yours."

"I BEG your pardon," said Flora, "but I have knocked three times; and—have you and Adam been quarrelling?" she added abruptly, as, advancing, she caught sight of Mignon bowed like Niobe in grief, with tears dropping down upon her clasped hands.

"No," said Mignon, sitting erect, "we have not been quarrelling." Her right hand tightened on that oft-perused, closely-guarded letter of Miss Sorel's, that now told a flattering tale of love and hope, and now suggested despair and desolation.

"It is rather early days to begin," said Flora; "so far as I can remember, Colin and I were perfect turtle-doves for the first month after we were married—though, to be sure," she added, as she sank into an easy-chair, "we have quarrelled without intermission ever since! It is always a mistake to cry," she went on with conviction; "to get into a rage is not half so disfiguring to one's appearance, and answers the purpose just as well!"

"But," cried Mignon, "we have not been quarrelling—I have not even seen Adam since breakfast, and——"

"Then have you been indulging in sentimental poetry, or are you a prey to melancholy?" said Flora. "If the latter, I can tell you of an excellent cure I saw in a book for it the other day: 'It is no small remedy to cure melancholy, to

rub your body all over with nettles.' I can't say I have ever tried it, but I make you a present of the suggestion!"

Flora was surveying herself from head to foot in a swing-glass with sincere admiration, and indeed, in out-of-door attire she was every whit as fine a woman as in a white morning-cap and gown; only she struck one as being almost too fine—one felt it an effort to get her all into one's eye at once.

"I am not quite sure," said Flora, taking up a hand-glass, and surveying herself with grave deliberation, "whether this shade of tea-rose is not rather too deep for my complexion. Of course, it's all very well for those whitey-brown women who can't supply any colour themselves, but when one has a skin like a peach, why one is obliged to be careful!"

Flora had long ago come to regard Mignon as a little, harmless, pretty schoolgirl, without an idea in her head, or even the sense to observe when she (Flora) made a fool of herself.

"It is very odd," said that young matron, as she slowly revolved before the presentment of her charms, "but wear what I will, people stare at me when I go out as if they had never seen a woman in all their lives before! It used to make Colin furious—he actually had the impertinence to declare that it was my fault; but now he goes his way, and I mine, and if we were to take a drive together, I am sure we should both feel as if the world were coming to an end!"

"And where is he this afternoon?" said Mignon, rousing herself with a great effort.

"Gone to town with Taffy and Colin the younger," said Flora. "But come!" she added, walking briskly to the window, and lifting the blind, "put on your hat and cloak, for if we dawdle about in this fashion, we shall never get out to-day."

"But I am not going out," said Mignon, who had by this time put away her letter and dried her eyes.

"But indeed you are!" said Flora. "Why, I do believe," she added suddenly, "that Simon Pure is going to town himself, for he has got on a respectable hat! So you have been quarrelling," she said, turning sharply round on Mignon, "and he is striding away,

"'All in his Sunday best,'

to sue for a divorce or catch the tidal-boat from Folkestone! My dear, I know his little ways, and there is—there certainly is—(or can it be merely the unusual elegance of his coat?) an unutterable something about his back that speaks volumes!"

A rustling of petticoats, a scramble of feet, the blind lifted a few inches higher, and Mignon, with an odd and unaccountable sinking at her heart, was also regarding the unusual spectacle of Adam in perfectly orthodox attire, disappearing in the distance.

"I wonder where he is going?" she said, dropping the blind and looking at Flora anxiously, "he scarcely ever goes out in the afternoon——"

"So he did not tell you he was going out," said Flora calmly; "I thought as much. Well—take my advice, my

dear, don't stand any nonsense with him—bring him down on his marrow-bones, and, for you're quite pretty enough, keep him there! When I married," she continued, returning to the contemplation of her charms, "I made up my mind never to yield a point, whether I was right or wrong, particularly if I were wrong, and I never did! It is only a question of pull devil, pull baker, and whichever pulls hardest and longest, wins!"

"Poor Colin!" thought Mignon, with a sigh.

"Here is your hat," said Flora, who had been rummaging among various bandboxes.

"Shall I go?" said the girl doubtfully, half to herself, half to Flora.

Five minutes ago the visit to town would have been firmly declined. Now Mignon hesitated; what had happened in the interval to work the change in her mind?

"Of course you will!" said Flora; "as that husband of yours has gone out himself, he can't possibly object to your going, or want you for this, that, or the other, as he generally does!"

No, indeed, it was rarely enough that Adam ever wanted her for anything now, thought Mignon, as she took up her gloves and followed Flora downstairs.

Mr. Montrose's men-servants were waiting in the sun with patient disgust, while Mr. Montrose's horses were champing their bits and pawing the gravel in their impatience to be gone.

Whatever might be the quality of the old gentleman's wits, his taste in horseflesh was unimpeachable, and no tightly

bearing-reined showy screw ever disgraced the respectability of his family chariot.

"After all," said Flora, as they rolled away, "it was very foolish of me to come out this broiling afternoon"—she moved her pale pink parasol a few inches and glanced up at the blazing sun overhead, "and very kind of you, I am sure, to accompany me!"

Mignon did not reply; she was wondering whether Adam had made up his mind to go out before or after Flora had appeared?

"The Park," said Flora, as the footman touched his hat for orders.

"Not that there will be a soul there," she added to Mignon; "how can you expect people to remain in town the last week in July, when they have a chance of getting out of it? If there is one thing on earth I made a mistake in," she went on with conviction, "it was in marrying—Colin! Boxed up in the Highlands for three parts of the year, with a visit to his mother in Piccadilly in June, a month with papa in July and August, these, including a visit to Ireland in the winter, are all the amusements I get; and really, except the winter trip, there's no fun to be got out of the whole twelve months! It all comes," she continued impressively, "of marrying a man who has not come into the title and estates, and who has an old father who literally seems to intend to live for ever; and until Sir Peter dies, we have nothing, absolutely nothing, to make life bearable!"

They were soon in the Park, and though, according to the notions of fashion, there might be "nobody" present, still

there were a good many people riding, driving, and walking about.

The scene was new to Mignon, and from beneath her white sunshade she looked about her with interest.

But if Mignon was amused, so was not Flora. The carriage had been drawn up under the trees, and as the minutes went by, and the stream of carriages on the one side, of people on the other, flowed slowly past, she grew more and more impatient, her fine colour grew finer still, her roving glance flitted incessantly from one to the other of the passing faces. Now and again a hat was raised to her, but its owner, after a more or less admiring glance at her blooming countenance, invariably passed on.

By-and-by, however, a languid voice murmured, "How d'ye do, Mrs. Dundas?" into the back of Flora's pink bonnet, and, turning with instantly-recovered good-humour, she found herself face to face with one of those frock-coated, tight-booted, eye-glassed gentlemen whose object in life appears to be to prove how contemptible and worthless man may be when he has nothing to occupy either his mind or his hands.

"How do you do?" said Flora, with great animation; "and where on earth do you spring from? Why, I have not seen you since—since——"

"Lady Waterdale's garden-party," he said, taking her hand and gently squeezing it, while his languid glance dwelt on her face as though, on the whole, he rather liked looking at it. Rather, not much, for this person's manner gave one the impression that it would be absolute death to him to be in earnest about anything.

"Mr. Colquhoun—my sister, Mrs. Montrose," said Flora, turning to Mignon; and with faint reluctance Mr. Colquhoun withdrew his gaze from the one occupant of the carriage to the other.

There is that in every woman's eyes which will instantly determine a man's glance either in the direction of respect or freedom. It is no more than the work of a moment, yet the woman's place in the man's estimation is then fixed for ever.

Thus Mr. Colquhoun, as he raised his hat to Mignon, became all at once aware that he was in the presence of some one altogether different from, and by no means to be confounded with, Flora.

"Is your husband here?" he said to the latter, his tone changing, his familiar, lounging attitude insensibly becoming more respectful.

Flora stared at him for a moment in silence. Was the man mad? Could any past or present admirer commit a more glaring solecism than to make inquiries after the lawful lord and master of one who herself totally ignored him?

"I believe he is very well," she said, with a slight shrug of the shoulders, and then was piqued to discover that Mr. Colquhoun was not listening for her reply, or indeed looking at her at all, but at Mignon.

He leaned over Mrs. Dundas. "Miss Montrose, surely?" he said in a very low voice; "not Mrs.?"

"She is my brother's wife," said Flora coldly.

"How d'ye do, Mrs. Dundas? How d'ye do, Colquhoun?"

And another dandy, even more fearfully and wonderfully made by his tailor than the man he addressed, paused to smirk, and bow, and murmur his little nothings, by the side of Flora's landau.

Flora was now in her element, coquetting, smiling, ogling, making herself, in short, as detestable as a woman in whom vanity has obliterated all traces of good breeding possibly can be

In all this Mignon took no part. Almost hidden beneath her white umbrella, she watched the passers-by undisturbed; and the two men, finding it impossible to win one look from those misty, exquisite blue eyes, devoted themselves to Flora and her follies, laughing loud and long at her sallies, with the laughter that is not with the person who provokes it, but against him.

"There is Colin!" exclaimed Mignon suddenly, feeling the sight of Colin's ugly honest countenance refreshing, and wishing with all her heart that she could pluck up enough spirit to jump out of the carriage and ask him to take care of her, together with Taffy and his brother.

"Is that you, Colin?" said Flora, in her loud, clear voice, that set the passers-by turning round to see from whom it proceeded.

"Come here—I want you."

At hearing himself addressed by his wife, he started, raised his hat, nodded, and passed on.

"Upon my word!" said Flora, reddening, and biting her lips as she caught a covert smile upon the faces of the two men beside her.

"How is Mrs. Crawley's husband?" Lord Steyne sometimes used to inquire of the immortal Becky.

It spoke something for Colin's manliness of character that, in spite of all that notorious flirt Flora Dundas might do, he was not known in society as Mrs. Dundas's husband.

"It is quite a family gathering, I am sure," said Flora sarcastically. "Is not that" (turning to Mignon) "your amiable spouse yonder?"

Mignon looked up quickly; yes, sure enough, at a little distance, and apparently watching her intently, was Adam. He too, when he found himself observed, waved his hand and disappeared in the crowd, his height marking him out to her eyes for some distance.

There came into her eyes so lovely a rush of colour, into her eyes so proud yet wistful a look, that Mr. Colquhoun, after duly noting these signs, turned and sought about him for their cause, with true masculine presumption concluding that they must be caused by one of his own sex.

"Is it possible?" suddenly exclaimed Flora, in tones of intense excitement; "yes—no—yes—it really is;" and regardless of the sun's scorching rays, she leaned eagerly forward to look at some one who was advancing slowly along the gravel walk.

Both men turned to stare; Mignon, catching something of Flora's excitement, also bent forward and beheld—Philip La Mert.

Haggard, ill-dressed, worn, strangely out of place in this arena of frivolity and fashion, brought hither by no thought of distraction or amusement, but seeking here, as in other

places, for that which he feared to find, loathing the search that he was compelled to prosecute, a shadow of the man who had shaken Prue into bringing Mignon her first love-letter but a little while ago.

"He does not see me," cried Flora breathlessly, too taken up with herself to see how the girl by her side was gazing at him with flushed cheeks, and her soul in her eyes.

But he saw neither her nor Flora; his gaze was bent beyond them both—bent on a person who seemed to have for him as great a fascination as he had for them.

Involuntarily Flora and Mignon turned to see what it was that he regarded; the two men turned also, and, as they looked, made up their mouths into the whistle, which is a man's invariable method of showing surprise or concern, and for which the fair sex has no equivalent.

A block in the carriages had occurred, and drawn up so close to Mr. Montrose's that Flora might have put out her hand to touch its sole occupant, was a Victoria, in which was seated a woman whose face, manner, and costume were as irreproachably faultless as her equipage and horses.

Cold, pure-looking as the white rosebuds that rested on her hair, she was the very impersonation of passionless perfection, and a greater contrast to the man whose eyes at that moment met her own could not well be conceived. It was as it should be—he was the sinner, she the sinned against; and as she looked, there dawned slowly on her lips a faint but haughty smile of triumph.

It was the work of a moment, then the carriage moved on, Philip La Mert had passed on his way, and,

"Who was that woman?" cried Mignon breathlessly something in that fair, cold face impressing her so strangely that she did not even note the disappearance of the man whom she had so ardently longed to see again.

"That," said Flora, drawing a deep breath, "was—Mrs. La Mert, now is—Miss Dorillon!"

"And will be Mrs. Des Vœux before three months are out," said Mr. Colquhoun, shrugging his shoulders, adding, *sotto voce*, and with more real disgust than one would have believed him capable of entertaining, "Demned bad taste on her part to show so soon after the row. I really couldn't have believed it of a woman whose taste in dress and everything was always so good, while as to La Mert—what the deuce brought him here?"

CHAPTER X.

"Good name in man and woman . . . .
Is the immediate jewel of their souls."

THE sensation of the afternoon was over.

The slight murmur that had passed from carriage to carriage, and from lip to lip of the circulating crowd at the spectacle of the meeting between the lately divorced husband and wife, had ceased, and as the lady passed on her way, the gentleman on his, a quick fire of exclamation, question and answer, ensued on all sides, to which Mignon listened with chill hands and throbbing heart, longing to see

him returning, to behold in his eyes the recognition for her that they had but a moment ago accorded to the handsome, cold-faced woman from whom she instinctively recoiled.

Other people, too, were on the look-out for Philip's return. Always a man of note, he had by recent events become more notorious still, and his sudden re-appearance in a well-known haunt of fashion simultaneously with that of Miss Dorillon, afforded endless ground for discussion amongst on-lookers.

To the majority of them the whole affair was a comedy; the heroine of the piece deserving special commendation for the address with which she had played her cards, and the signal skill with which she had turned the tables on a man who did not deserve well at any woman's hands.

Flora, in the midst of ejaculations, surmises, and many cranings of her neck in search of the returning form of Philip, was interrupted by Mignon, who, leaning forward, asked: "Do you think that Mr. Rideout will come back?"

"Mr. Rideout!" repeated Flora, "why, who on earth do you mean, child? I don't know any Mr. Rideout——"

"But that was he," said Mignon, rather impatiently; "he passed just now, and you told me that lady was his—his wife, and——"

"That was Mr. La Mert," said Flora; "but how on earth do you come to know anything about him?" she added quickly; then, in the same breath, "Oh! Adam has told you about him, of course! No, my dear, I do not think he

is coming back; I am afraid there is no such luck. If it had not been for that horrid woman passing just when she did, he could not have helped seeing me, and I should have been able to introduce you to the most charming man in town!"

Introduce her! Mignon grew first red, then pale, as Flora spoke, but as the latter turned to Mr. Colquhoun, the moment for acknowledging her previous acquaintance with Philip passed by, and there never afterwards came to her an opportunity of saying: "He was my lover once, and asked me to marry him."

It is often a trifle that determines a man's destiny, it is often a slight cause that separates friends or lovers,

> "It is the little rift within the lute
> That by-and-by will make the music mute,
> And ever widening, slowly silence all;"

and in the days that came after, it seemed to more than one, that if Mignon had told her sister's story and her own to Flora, the end would not have been what it was. . . . She did not again seek to engage Flora's attention. She sat quite still, a deadly feeling of disappointment that was almost despair filling her heart. At sight of Philip, a breathless gladness, a sensation as of one who comes face to face with a thing longed for, yet totally unexpected, had possessed her with a vehemence that left her no power of speech, else would she have called upon him by name, heedless of all save that once more she found herself in his presence. Then, some fascination drawing her eyes to the

woman whose gaze he was returning, her attention had become fixed, and when she looked for him, he had disappeared.

In vain Philip La Mert's numerous acquaintances lounged, and watched, and waited; he did not return. Neither was Miss Dorillon again visible, which was a severe disappointment to many dear friends who had barely caught a glimpse of her in passing, and who were naturally anxious to see how she looked under her present peculiar circumstances. It is the instinct of a man, when a woman is suffering acute shame or pain of mind, to avert his eyes from her; it is disagreeable, even painful to him to witness it, no matter how thoroughly she may have brought her punishment upon herself: the impulse of a sister woman is in a totally opposite direction.

"You are not going home?" exclaimed Mignon, rousing herself as Flora, after an effusive farewell of her popinjays, and many parting wavings of her pink hand, had given the order "home."

"But indeed I am," said Flora, settling herself luxuriously into her corner; "have you forgotten that there is such a thing as dinner in the world? Still, I would willingly wait half-an-hour longer, dinner notwithstanding, if I thought there was a chance of seeing Philip La Mert again!"

"You know him well?" asked Mignon timidly.

"Know him well, my dear? Of course I do—who doesn't? He always was a well-known man, but now——"

"But what has he done?" said Mignon eagerly.

"If you ask me what he has done," said Flora profoundly, "I am bound to tell you that one volume, ten, twenty, would

not contain the record of his deeds, good, bad, and indifferent; but if you ask me what he has not done, why, I could answer you far more easily!"

"Is it a bad thing," said Mignon, "to be divorced from a wife?"

"It is a very excellent thing indeed," said Flora, "when the wife happens to be a Miss Dorillon; but as a rule, my dear, Mrs. Grundy does not approve."

"But was Miss Dorillon—wicked?" said Mignon below her breath.

"In the eyes of the world," said Flora, "she is as white as the flowers she wears to-day on her bonnet, while Philip La Mert is the *âme damnée* to whom it has been her unfortunate fate to be linked, but the few who are behind the scenes, who are acquainted with the story from beginning to end, think—differently."

"And what is the story?" said Mignon eagerly; "he loved her, I suppose, and she did not love him, was that it?"

For lately, Mignon had been reading more than one love story; moreover, she had been thinking, and had somehow arrived at a far truer notion of love and love's requirements, than she ever had before.

"If a man's love for a woman may be gauged by the pains he is at to win her," said Flora, "then Philip loved the fair Una very much indeed; if you measure it by his behaviour to her after he has obtained her, I should say that he disliked her extremely."

"But why did he marry her, then?" asked Mignon im-

petuously, "or perhaps," she added, in a lower key, "it was out of kindness?"

"Dear me, no!" said Flora, "he was by no means a man to sacrifice himself upon the altar of duty! Mr. La Mert's feeling for her, my dear, like half the so-called love in the world, was pure obstinacy. It makes me laugh when I hear people admiring the dogged perseverance of a man who persists in his suit to a woman who can't bear him; the good souls think that as there is no return, his must be pure disinterested love, but not a bit of it! Oftener than not he is simply actuated by pique (pique will drive a man into anything), and determined that neither she nor the world shall have the laugh against him. If at length his fervour melts her coldness, ten to one but as she thaws, he will freeze, revenging himself upon her for her previous insolence and disdain. A man may, and often does, forgive you for breaking his heart, but for the wound you have inflicted on his vanity? Never!"

"Then she did not love him?" said Mignon.

"No," said Flora, reflectively, "she most certainly did not."

"It is a long tale," she added, after a short pause devoted to the silencing of one or two scruples of conscience, about acquainting this child with so unedifying a story as was that of Mr. La Mert's life. Adam would be furious if he knew, but what did his fury matter to her? Perhaps she was even impelled to tell Mignon the story by her dislike of Adam. And after all, was not this girl a married woman, and must she not sooner

or later become acquainted with the backsliding ways of this wicked world?

"A very long story!" repeated Flora, "though it does not take very long to tell. The saddest stories are usually summed up in the fewest words!"

"It is a sad one then?" exclaimed Mignon involuntarily.

"Can you look him in the face and doubt it?" said Flora. "My dear, he is one of those mortals upon whom the fairies at birth bestow every good gift a man can desire, but the queen of the fairies, who comes last, angry, perhaps, at the lavish generosity of the others, makes him—unlucky! With advantages in his favour that make other men ready to die of envy, luck has always gone dead against him, and I feel convinced, always will to his dying day!

"They used to say," she went on, "that he scarcely ever stirred without something untoward happening to him. If he rode a race, the horse was sure to come to grief; if he backed one, it was bound to lose; he lost a fortune at cards, and never appeared upon the box seat of the coach of his regiment, without causing the other men present to tremble for their lives. However, if he was unlucky in all else, he was brilliantly successful in one thing—Love."

"And yet you say his wife did not care for him?" said Mignon quickly.

"No, she did not. There the inevitable evil genius of his destiny stepped in. I should have said that he was brilliantly successful with women up to a certain point—beyond it his bad luck asserted itself, and he was as unlucky in his relations with women as with everything else.

"Have you ever read the life of Burns?" she went on, "and do you remember the Duchess of Gordon saying that nobody had ever so completely carried her off her feet as Robert Burns did? Well, no one ever so completely carried me off my feet as Philip La Mert did! Not that he was ever an admirer of mine," she sighed impatiently, "but I used to meet him winter after winter in Dublin, and——"

"In Dublin!" repeated Mignon, sitting bolt upright, and regarding Flora with breathless eagerness—"in Dublin did you say?"

"To be sure—why not?" said Flora, who hated to be interrupted.

"Did you know a Mrs. Falkner?" said Mignon, leaning forward and laying her eager hand on Flora's plump arm.

"No," said Flora, after a few moments of reflection, "I did not! One can't know everybody in Dublin, you know, and very likely she did not go into society."

"I don't know," said Mignon, trembling, "but perhaps her daughters, who were nearly grown up, did. You are sure that you never met them out—or their governess, a Miss Brook?"

"Never!" said Flora with calm decision; "I feel quite sure that I have never met the Misses Falkner or their governess!

"However, to continue, it must be—let me see—quite four years since I first met Philip La Mert in Dublin. He was then the wildest of all the wild fellows of the —th Dragoons, then quartered in that city."

"And he was a favourite with women, you say?" said Mignon, sighing.

"He had the reputation," said Flora, looking absently out at the hedgerows, "of never failing to win any woman who was beautiful enough to please his fastidious taste, and from what I myself have seen, I believe rumour in this instance to speak no more than the truth. I never shall forget the flutter there used to be when Mr. Philip would come into a ball-room, very late, with half the beauties in the room sitting down because they would not fill up their cards till he had taken such dances as he pleased!"

"And his marriage?" said Mignon impatiently, "when and how did that happen? and——"

"My dear," said Flora calmly, "are you aware that it is extremely ill-bred to interrupt a person who is telling you a story? If you will have a little patience, I shall come to that in good time. It was in—let me see—the second winter, I think, of my acquaintance with Philip La Mert, two years and a half ago, that something—happened. He fell in love, or pretended to do so. Hitherto, it had been well-known that for all his brilliant successes with women, he had never in his life had more than a passing fancy, and that in spite of his bad reputation, no man had a keener appreciation of, or reverence for, feminine virtue than he. So that when in the winter I mention he was found paying court to Miss Dorillon, a cold, heavy blonde, who was by some people suspected of being by no means as demure as she looked, everybody marvelled, firstly

at his bad taste, secondly at her indifference, for indifferent she undoubtedly was, in this respect differing totally from every other woman upon whom Mr. Philip had deigned to cast a favouring eye. Some people said, ill-naturedly enough, that it was her stupidity which attracted him, that his own vitality being so intense, he found in her torpidity a welcome rest—and, indeed, did not Clive Newcome himself lay down the axiom that some women ought to be stupid? 'What you call dulness, I call repose,' says he. 'Give me a calm woman, a slow woman, a lazy, majestic woman! . . . A lively woman would be the death of me!' Well, there are many such men in the world as Mr. Clive, and upon my word, when all is said and done, I think those dull majestic creatures get the best of it!

"Women professed to wonder at what the men could see in Miss Dorillon, but undoubtedly she was handsome in her cold way. Not beautiful; had she been so, the question would never have been raised, for, my dear, there is a royalty about real beauty that the world, spiteful as it is, never fails to recognise; it is like diamonds, or talent of any kind, and always commands its market, so when you hear people disputing about So-and-So's good looks, make up your mind that she is handsome, odd, fascinating or lovable—but really beautiful?—not a bit of it.

"She certainly was handsome, but she had no conversation, she never exerted herself to amuse anybody, and to old, young, handsome and ugly men alike, she exhibited a profound indifference, which disgusted some, and piqued others. Of these latter was Philip La Mert.

"Some thought he was amusing himself as usual, others that he was now in earnest for the first time in his life; the women were beside themselves with envy and jealousy, and, seeing how well coldness seemed to succeed with him, were fain to try it themselves; but, my dear, that is the sort of thing that must be tried first—not last.

"As to Miss Dorillon, the most consummate coquette living could not have played her cards better than she (if her object was to win Philip La Mert); to all appearance she had thoroughly mastered the first and most important axiom of a practised flirt—'First attract, then keep cool;' only, as it turned out afterwards, her frigidity was not acting at all, but good, honest, downright indifference. She was a mulish creature, without a ray of imagination, or surely her heart must have been touched by a man who knew how to make love as charmingly as did Mr. La Mert."

"But the story," said Mignon, heaving just such a little quick short sigh as children give when they are told the "crisis" of the fairy tale is coming, "the story! I want to know how it all ended!"

"We shall come to that presently," said Flora, in a tone of rebuke. "Well, time went by, a month, six weeks, and the position of affairs between the two remained precisely the same as before. The lady had not abated her coldness in the smallest degree; the gentleman had not advanced an inch, yet showed no slightest intention of abandoning his attack on the fortress. Then one fine morning Dublin was surprised by the news that Mr. La Mert and Miss Dorillon were engaged and would be married very shortly indeed.

"It was a nine days' wonder. Only the day before, she had been as indifferent to him as ever; something must have happened in the interim to make her change her mind, but what, no one could find out.

"With pomp and show, and much pageantry and ringing of bells, those two were made one, and I am bound to say that a handsomer pair than Una and Philip La Mert never walked out of a church door together.

"They went away for two months, and when they reappeared, it was plain that, if they had departed with but little love between them, they returned with still less. I happened to come to the knowledge of what had occurred to render the new-married couple so remarkably 'semi-detached,' or rather entirely alienated."

"What was it?" asked Mignon.

"I will tell you, my dear. Mr. La Mert had not been married a month, when he opened by accident a letter addressed to his wife. Its contents were such as to make him search among her belongings for others in a like handwriting. He found sufficient to prove that he had been deceived. Miss Dorillon had not married him because his attractions had conquered a hitherto impregnable heart, but because the man whom she loved, but who had not means upon which to marry, had been tempted into marrying an heiress, and she had learned the fact just as Mr. La Mert's courtship of herself made his intentions unmistakable. He discovered that she had married him partly from revenge, and partly from interest; and the letter he had found was from her

false lover, reproaching her, and foretelling for her the repentance which he himself already experienced.

"I believe the subject was never mentioned between them, but that she missed the letter and drew her own conclusions. Only one thing is certain—that Mrs. La Mert, though she had deceived her husband as to her previous feelings, and married him from motives which were cruel and injurious to him, behaved in so unimpeachable a manner, that her greatest enemy could not have found a single stone to throw at her.

"He was not very much to be pitied. He had married her from motives little more worthy than her own, but he thought himself extremely ill-used, and, with his characteristic promptitude and recklessness, he made up his mind that, as the law gave him no redress, he would compel her to invoke it on her own behalf, and thereupon (for free of her he vowed to be) he ordered his life in such fashion that no woman of any pride or self-respect could be expected to endure such conduct.

"Her family were furious, her friends were prodigal with their pity, she herself made no sign, uttered no complaint, appeared, faultlessly attired, in public as usual, with perfect ease and unconcern; behaved, in short, so like a modern Grisel, that by those who did not know her, she was regarded as a model of wifely long-suffering and forbearance, while those who did, speculated in vain as to what her tactics might be.

"The world called her stupid, but the world was mistaken, she was a clever woman. She had made herself

thoroughly acquainted with the law of divorce, and knew that were she to proceed against her husband, she could obtain no more than a judicial separation, under which she would not be free to marry again, and this would by no means have served her ends, so she watched and waited and bided her time, with persistence and patience that must nearly have driven him crazy.

"It was said that again and again she did her utmost to provoke him to strike her, for could she have established a charge of cruelty, her object would have been gained, but he never stooped so low as that; and so, foiled in this, she quietly sat down and waited until such time as it should please him openly to desert her.

"Meanwhile the wife of the man she loved died very suddenly, leaving him rich and free. I fancy that under her Spartan cloak of indifference the fox was gnawing her vitals rather cruelly about this time, but she made no sign, received everybody, went everywhere, and answered all polite inquiries concerning her absent husband with incomparable sauvity and unconcern; in short, was the wonder while he was the scandal of Dublin.

"We were in Dublin during the courtship; we were there when the young people returned after the marriage, but soon afterwards Colin whisked me off to those detestable Highlands, and the rest of the story I got from hearsay, though the facts of the case were so simple that they did not admit of much exaggeration. Mr. Philip, one fine morning, resigned his commission, and disappeared altogether, but not, it was said, alone. He has since been seen or heard of from

time to time in odd out-of-the-way places, and always, strange to say, with the same woman, who is, if rumour speaks truth, very lovely, and indeed she must be a paragon to have made such a man as he—constant! It was actually said that when he should be free of his wife, he meant to marry the woman, and, indeed," she added, shrugging her shoulders, "he had a noble heart, and was generous to a fault, so that it is, alas, only too possible that he might be guilty of even such a crowning folly as that!"

"You call that a folly?" said Mignon, pale with trembling lips, "a folly to keep faith with a gentle loving creature who trusted him? Oh! for shame, for shame! You cannot mean that!"

"My dear child," said Flora placidly, "why do you attempt to talk about things of which you understand nothing? Mr. La Mert's divorce will not make the difference of a rush to him; he will still be welcomed in society, and free to choose a wife out of one of the best families in England, but to marry a creature like that would simply be social ruin, and I should say no one was better aware of the fact than he is."

Mignon did not reply. . . . She was recalling his words on that sole occasion of his wooing, when he had bade her remember always in the days to come how he had loved her in spite of all—all, and she understood now that he was alluding to that poor girl who had loved him, even as it might be Muriel had trusted and loved some other man . . .

"I think I have told you all the story," said Flora briskly;

"all, that is to say, that is of any consequence. By the way, though, I forgot to say that when Mrs. La Mert found herself actually deserted by her husband, she went back to her mother, and there dwelt in the sight of all the world, her every action open to the closest scrutiny, until the two years had elapsed that, as proving desertion, alone enabled her to sue for a divorce. She last month obtained it, and in the eyes of the world she is a woman without speck or flaw in her moral character, at whom no one, however rash, would dare to point the finger of calumny. She now figures before us for a short time as Miss Dorillon; as soon as decency permits, the curtain will rise on her as Mrs. Des Vœux.

"But Mr. La Mert—his adventures are by no means over, or I am much mistaken. He is one of those people who seem born to distinguish themselves in some unfortunate manner, and to whom death itself does not come in the common way.

"He looked as though things were going very wrong with him," added Flora, shaking her head. "I never saw any one so fearfully changed. I wish I could have spoken to him—though, for goodness' sake, child," she hastily said, as the carriage rolled swiftly round the plot of evergreens opposite Rosemary, and the horses drew up before the door with a flourish, "don't tell either father or Colin that I meditated any such crime, for I verily believe that they would consider His Satanic Majesty an agreeable, harmless sort of companion, compared with the man whose history I have just given you!"

CHAPTER XI.

"Mistress, know yourself; down on your knees,
And thank heaven fasting for a good man's love."

"PRUE," said Mignon, "don't you think that if one got married at all, it would be better to marry somebody that one loved?"

"Yes, Miss Mignon, I do."

"And would you consider it a very bad thing for a person to run away with somebody else, if he or she had a wife or husband that it was not possible to like or respect?"

"I should think it just about as bad as bad could be," said Prue, in horror; "people as like each other well enough to marry ought to stick together as well for worse as for better."

"But supposing," said Mignon, "that they didn't get married because they liked each other—indeed, rather the contrary than otherwise—why, what then, Prue?"

Somebody who was busying himself with a blown-down creeper outside the open window, and had heard every word of the foregoing conversation, involuntarily made a step forward, as though to see what expression the speaker's face wore, as she asked Prue the question with which her speech concluded.

Instantly checking himself, however, he threw down the garden implement he held, and moved quickly away.

"What was that?" exclaimed Prue, hearing the sound of retreating footsteps, then, advancing to the window, and look

ing out, her face became anxious as she recognised in the vanishing personage, Adam. "O, Miss Mignon," she said, turning back, "that was the master, and he must have heard every word you said!"

"And why should I mind if he did hear me?" she said proudly; "is he an ogre, that you should always be saying, 'Miss Mignon, you must not say this, and you must not say that, for master won't like it?'"

"He's no ogre," said Prue, "he's real good. There's them as has nasty corners and nooks in their hearts out of which a little devil pops every now and then, and gives you a scare, and there's them as seems better and better the longer you lives with them, and never surprises you but with something pleasant; and master's one of 'em, as you'll find out some day, Miss Mignon."

Long ago Prue had dropped Mignon's matronly title, habit proving too strong for her.

"And do you suppose I have not found that out already?" said Mignon; "do you suppose that a single day passes that I do not tell myself how much I owe him, and what a miserable, homeless little wretch I should be if he had not taken pity on me and married me?"

She concluded her speech with one of those old wilful stamps of the foot that lately Prue had missed rather sadly.

"Eh!" she said, looking in astonishment at the girl, "it's not that way, dear heart, he'd be wishing you to think, to say nothing of it's not being the truth, Miss Mignon, for don't we all know as how he married you for pure love, and nothing else besides?"

"You don't understand, Prue," said the girl, turning aside; "he asked me because—because it was his nature to be good and kind, and he pretended to want me very badly, that I might not feel he was doing me a great favour, but he cannot hide from me, no, nor from himself, that he is sorry now for what he did so hastily, and I——" She threw down the needlework, and covered her face with both her hands, "I wake up sometimes in the night and blush all over when I think it is all my own doing, that if I had not called him that evening, probably I should never have seen him again; he would not even have thought of such a thing as marrying me!"

"He thought of it long afore that," said Prue with decision; "he've watched you growing up these two years, and allers meant to get you, sooner or later. And as to his being sorry, Miss Mignon, why that's a most rediklous idea; it ain't prating of love as proves it, it's actions, and master's good enough at they."

"He promised to help me find her; but do you know"—she came nearer to Prue, looking anxiously at her with lovely, troubled eyes—"that sometimes I almost think that it would not trouble him very much if Muriel never came back to me at all?"

Prue, with a strange pang at her heart, looked into the wistful, childish face so near her own, and said never a word.

Trouble was beginning to tell upon the girl; constant thought and restless, wakeful nights were by degrees robbing her of that lovely look of youth that, let folks say what they

will, is not compensated for by any after beauty of expression, intellect, or the chastened peace that is the crown of great suffering. Already the softness on brow and lip, the unworn look that is never seen upon the face of the man or woman who in the battle of life has borne the burden and heat of the day, was fading, and dark shadows were beginning to be apparent beneath the blue eyes that a short time ago were lustrous with health and spirits.

Her voice, too, had grown thin, and in no respect does the weal or woe of the soul and body show more unmistakably than in the quality of the voice. The round, full notes that come straight from the joyous heart tell their own tale, even as do those others that speak of a life barren and destitute of the love and nourishment it demands.

"He seemed to understand," she went on, thinking aloud. "That day, that awful, never-to-be forgotten day, I don't think he could have been more sorry and distressed if it had been his own sister; and if he had not been there to tell me it was not my darling, I think I should have gone quite mad." She paused, growing rigid and white.

"Oh!" said Prue, "you mean Mr. Rideout, Miss Mignon? Ah, well! I don't reckon you owe much thanks to him about nothing! Many's the time I've been down on my bones in a regler bust of thanksgiving that 'twas master you married, not him!"

"He would have helped me to find her," said Mignon, starting up restlessly. "I could not tell any one why I did, why I do feel that he was interested in Muriel, that he knew

her, had spoken to her, how else could he have told me that day that . . . it was not her?"

Prue shook her head doubtfully, but made no reply. With dismay the woman had beheld the gradual change in Mignon's attitude towards this lover who had formerly pleased her neither in looks or ways, while with even greater concern she recognised the relations that existed between the young husband and wife, and sorrowfully enough foresaw that there was trouble in store for the girl whom she had so fondly believed to be safely placed beyond the storm and struggle of life.

It was not for Prue to guess how, gradually but surely, Philip La Mert had assumed in Mignon's mind the character of a friend to Muriel, and how he was consequently exalted in the girl's mind (no matter how unworthy he might be in other respects) into a creature who called forth her warmest gratitude, while Adam, alas! was fast becoming to her the cold and indifferent guardian, who had no sympathy with either her love or anxiety for Muriel, and who, if he would not actually hold up his hand to keep her back, would assuredly not raise it to help her.

In her heart she said that it was all of a piece with the rest of his behaviour, that he should have broken his promise of helping to find Muriel—though in this she was unjust, for what opportunity had as yet offered for either of them to do aught but sit quietly down and wait? And even as she was engrossed by her selfish thoughts and sorrow, so perhaps was he by his. Moreover there was a reason why the merest allusion to Muriel's return should be intolerable

to him; more than ever complicated had matters become of late, and there were times when he felt himself absolutely appalled at the possibilities of the future.

"Sometimes I think," said the girl, clasping her little hands upon her heart and sighing wofully, "that after all Miss Sorel was right and I am wrong, and that she will never come back: or perhaps she has grown as weary of her life as that poor shop-girl did, and somewhere she is lying cold, and drowned and stiff, just like that other. . . . There is scarcely a night that I do not wake up with that face before me, and then I long with all my heart to see him who will tell me that I am mistaken, that it is not so; for do you know that for a long while he lived in Dublin and most likely saw her there, and that was why he was able to tell me that what I saw was not my darling?"

"Young ladies as has any care for their good names isn't likely to see much of him," said Prue thoughtlessly, "leastways, I mean, Miss Mignon——"

"What do you know of him, I should like to know," cried Mignon passionately, "that you take upon yourself to say he is this or that? To hear people talk, one would think he was the wickedest man that ever lived, instead of being ill-used and deceived just like anybody else, for I am sure he looks sad and miserable enough to make any one pity him!"

"He did look very bad when he went away from here," said Prue, relenting a little, "but there, his heart was just as wicked as ever, as was easy to tell by the way he ran on when——" she paused abruptly.

"He found me gone," said Mignon. "But what did he say, and was he unconscious long?"

"He come to himself soon after you went," said Prue reluctantly. "What did he say, miss? 'Twould be foolish work to repeat it; he was mad and angry, and folks never mean what they say when they're like that—I've forgot."

"And did you tell him we had gone to Paris?" persisted Mignon, who had never been able to induce Prue to give her a circumstantial account of what occurred that day after her departure.

"I? no, indeed!" said Prue, in horror.

"Then it was by chance that we met him there," said Mignon half aloud, "pure chance—though indeed," she added, sighing, "it was a very lucky one, for if we had not, Prue, I think I should be where Silas Sorel is now."

"Ah! poor man!" said Prue, shivering, "really them few days after that telegram came, was regler battle, murder, and sudden death, nothing but horrid things coming one a-top of another, and not time to draw breath, so to speak, between 'em!"

"Tell me about Silas," said the girl, drawing nearer to the woman; "you've only told me about it in fits and starts, and I want to hear it right through from beginning to end."

"Well, Miss Mignon," said Prue, threading her needle with an air of importance, "'twas about five o'clock in the afternoon, and I'd pretty nigh got over the fright Mr. Rideout had give me, and was having a bit of a cry in the kitchen, when who should walk straight in but Mr. Sorel.

"He stood looking at me a minute, then said: 'So that pair of fools has got married, have they?'

"Said I: 'If you mean my master and mistress, sir, they have.'

"He pulled down the corners of his lips at that, and said: 'How was it you didn't go with 'em? I 'spose three simpletons could travel about as well as two?'

"So I said, 'I didn't know as any of us was more foolish than our neighbours, and I'd only stopped in the house because I didn't like to leave it to itself (cook being gone and all) till he sent somebody in to take charge of it.' Not to mention, Miss Mignon, that you'd give me most perticler orders to sit down outside the gates (as soon as he'd turned me out) and not stir from 'em night and day till you come back, in case Miss Muriel should walk in unexpected, and find nobody here."

"Did I really tell you to do that, Prue?" said Mignon, smiling in spite of herself.

"You did, Miss Mignon, and though I'd have done my best, still I couldn't quite promise to do that.

"Well, Mr. Sorel he looked me up and down sharp like, and then said he, 'I may find you useful by-and-by, so just you stop where you are, and don't leave this house till I tell you to,' which I thought pretty good imperence; but as stopping in the house was a sight better than hanging about outside, with the perlice for everlasting telling you to keep moving on, why I thought I'd stop and see what 'd come next.

"Mr. Sorel he went upstairs and all over the house, look-

ing here and there, and everywhere, and last of all he went into poor missus's room and shut the door.

"I didn't hear a sound of him till 'twas nearly dark, then he rang the bell and I went up. He was sitting before her writing-table, with his head bent down over something in his hand, but when I come back with the light he'd told me to bring, his hand was empty, and his eyes was hard and dry as stones. He said I was to wait, opened the desk, and took out a piece of paper Miss Sorel had set just inside. 'Twas a list of the names and addresses of all the young ladies as had been at Rosemary for the half before, and was expected for the next, and he read 'em out to me one by one, and asked me if they was all right. I told him yes, and then he said I could go down, he'd call me when I was wanted, and I saw no more of him till half-past ten o'clock, when he come down with a great budget of letters, and said he, putting one of his fingers on 'em, 'You'll never see any of these young ladies again, for I've written to tell 'em my sister is dead—is dead.' Just like that, then he stared about him a bit confused-like, and went away without saying any more.

"Next morning he come again, and said he was going away for a while, but I was to take care of the place, and not let a soul come nigh it but tradespeople. He'd got to look very broken and ill, and stared about as if it was all strange to him, and once or twice he got suspicious, and asked me where you might be, and if you was likely to be coming back, and if I dared to let you come inside the gates he would punish me by the law; but for all his talk he seemed

just spent-like and feeble, and as if he'd got no strength to go into a passion about it. And then he went away, I think 'twas somewhere to see about her tomb, for he'd took her all the way from Paris back to her old home to be buried.

"'Twas a fortnight before he came back, and then he looked worse than ever. He told me to make up a bed in the room next Miss Sorel's, and when night come, he just crept into it.

"The next day he wrote a letter and gave it to me to post, and I looked hard at it, to know the address again, for he seemed to me to be going very queer, and I was getting in a fright to know what I should do if he got real bad. He scarcely touched nothing, and snapped and snarled at me if I tried to get him to eat, but 'twas all over very soon. On the third day after he come back, I heard a strange sort of noise upstairs about the time of dusk, and though I was terrible frightened, being all alone in the house, I crept upstairs and listened, and the door being open of Miss Sorel's room, I looked in.

"He was kneeling by the bedside with his arms spread out over the coverlid, and talking to her, like as if he thought she was there, seeming to fancy they was both little children again together, and going out in the woods a-maying . . . and then I knew how it was with him, Miss Mignon, and just shut the door and come softly away, for somehow I wasn't a bit afraid of the poor soul; but I wrote off to the address I'd seen, and by the next evening a gentleman, Mr. Sorel's cousin he said he was, had come.

"Mr. Silas didn't seem to know him a bit, only laughed

and cried all in a breath, when they tried to take him home, but at last they got him away by telling him he would find her there. He was but a few years older than Miss Sorel, yet you'd have said he was an old man, Miss Mignon, as they led him away, and you never would have known him to be the same as said such wicked words to you out yon, when master come over the wall to the rescue.

"The cousin, he put me in charge of all while he went to Yorkshire, but he was soon back again, and asked me about things, and without more ado he just went to an agent, and said Mr. Sorel wasn't likely to be ever any better, and as he was next-of-kin and had to act for Mr. Silas, he'd be glad to get rid of Rosemary, and Mr. Montrose's agent being on the look-out, it all got managed very easy and quick, for all the world just like a fairy tale, I used to think. I didn't write nothing to you till 'twas all done, but master he knew all about it. There was a sight of letters come for Mr. Sorel, and I handed 'em over to the cousin, and there was two or three for me, one in perticler from Miss Lu-Lu, wanting to know all about it, and where you was, and what you meant to do. So I just wrote and said you was married, and I guess, Miss Mignon, she didn't get over that bit of news for a week."

"We had some happy times together, she and I," said Mignon with a heavy sigh: "what fun we used to have over that book we were writing, and that we shall never finish now! I miss the girls," she went on sadly, "and the noise they made, and the hard lessons we had to learn. At any rate, our days were well filled, and we had not over

much time to think! You know I always dreaded the holidays, always found it dreadfully dull to talk to Bumble and play croquet all alone, but now that it is one long indefinite holiday, with no day to look forward to when they will all be coming back again, it is much worse, and if she does not come, it may go on for ever, and ever, and ever! Indeed, I've got a dreadful sort of feeling, Prue, that if anybody happened to be walking by Rosemary a hundred years hence, he would find you an old mummy in the kitchen, Mr. Montrose melted into a mound of dust in the midst of his books, and me sitting on the wooden chair in the kitchen garden, watching still for somebody who never came!"

CHAPTER XII.

"The education of life perfects the thinking mind, but depraves the frivolous."

"THE mystic hour draws nigh," said Flora, "that will consign us one and all to the dungeon keep of Glen-luce.

"To-day is the sixth, on the tenth a procession of men and women, footmen and maids, children, babies, horses, dogs, and animals will be formed; father, being the least competent for the post, will assume the bâton of command, and having fussed one half of us into tears, and the other half into active ill-temper, will land us all triumphantly at the ancestral barn somewhere towards the small hours of the morning. Why on earth cannot balloons be made prac-

ticable for travelling purposes, I wonder? Just fancy the delight of stepping in, bag and baggage, and not having to stir until one got to one's journey's end! I have no doubt our grandchildren will enjoy the luxury, while we have to suffer for being born a hundred years too soon!"

"But why is Glen-luce like a dungeon?" said Mignon, who sat on the grass with hands clasped about her knees, and a weary look in her blue eyes.

"How can a place be anything else when there is scarcely a soul in it who is not your husband, or your father, or your brother? People rave about the scenery, and ask me how I can be dull in the midst of so much beauty; but I should like to know who would not get sick of looking at the same thing day after day, week after week, year after year! Can trees and rocks and waterfalls talk to you, I should like to know? Admiring the beauties of nature all alone is something like looking at the moon by yourself, extremely unsatisfactory work!"

"But I thought you had some neighbours?" said Mignon, "the McCloskys."

"Just so, my dear, the McCloskys, for there is nobody else. We are five miles from the nearest town, three from a doctor, two from the kirk, and ten from anything like a pleasant or entertaining neighbour. Bluebeard himself would be hailed with rejoicing if he rose from the dead and settled down in Glen-luce."

"And your father's house, where is that?"

"Strathsaye? Oh, near enough. The Montrose and Dundas estates adjoin each other; I don't know of any

other reason why father gave his consent to my marrying Colin. There never was a father yet to whom a ring-fence was not irresistible, you know. It must have been a dreadful blow to him about the McClosky estates," she added, shaking her smooth head; "he had quite set his heart on Adam's marrying the daughter, and then the whole of the Glen would have been in the family."

"And was the young lady—willing?" said Mignon, turning her head aside.

"Oh, dear, yes. But where was I? talking about that dreadful old barn. Of course, when I married Colin I had no idea those two old people, Sir Peter and his wife, would take it into their heads to live in the town-house and give us the one in the Highlands. What on earth can they want with a house in Piccadilly, I should like to know, at their time of life? And, of course, as they are within reach of the best advice, they are as likely as not to live for ever!"

"But is not Colin attached to them?" said Mignon, regarding Flora with disapproval.

"Oh! I believe so—especially to his mother; indeed, it is all her doing that he has such absurdly narrow-minded ideas about everything. However, she is a sensible old soul, and never attempts to interfere with me in any way, and as I come to town every spring, and it is less trouble and expense than taking a furnished house, I never quarrel with her."

"And has your father lived here long?" said Mignon, glancing at the pleasant-looking white house whose upper windows were visible in the distance.

"Oh! yes, a long time, six or seven years quite. He spends one half the year here, and the other half at Strathsaye; but my charming brother, since he has become studious, lives here pretty well all the year round. It was a most ridiculous place to come to, not sufficiently near town to be convenient, and yet not far enough out to command good grounds and real country. However, you will have country enough and to spare at Glen-luce for the next three months, I can tell you!"

"But I am not going," said Mignon, thoroughly startled; 'why should I do that? How can I do that? At any moment somebody may come."—She paused, blushed deeply, and said no more.

"Somebody may come?" repeated Flora, looking at the girl's averted face with suddenly aroused quick curiosity; "but I thought there was nobody—that you had no relations, no friends, no anything — who then may be this mysterious somebody?"

Mignon, turning her head still farther aside, shamed through and through at the deceit she was maintaining, none the less found it impossible to put confidence in Flora Dundas.

That young matron, laying down her needlework, was meanwhile surveying the girl from an entirely new point of view. What did this confusion mean . . . after all, was the explanation of Mignon's coldness to her husband to be found in the fact that she had, in schoolgirl fashion, fixed her childish heart upon somebody else?

If so, what a glorious punishment was in store for Adam the gardener, to be sure!

"Upon my word, child, you began pretty early," she said at last, with some envy in her voice; "how you ever got opportunities for such jinks I'm sure I don't know; I didn't when I was at school. There was one young man," she added meditatively, "that I positively adored—I actually lost my appetite on his account for a whole week—and though, of course, we never exchanged a word, we used to write each other love-letters, but in case we were found out, he used to sign himself 'Lilywhite,' and I used to sign myself 'The Rat-catcher's Daughter.' We put our letters in a hole in the wall just outside the garden gates, but one fine morning we were caught, so there was an end of that; but I'm sure my heart never thumped as hard and fast for Colin, as it did for that moon-faced young man in drab inexpressibles!"

As though to illustrate the adage, Colin himself at this moment appeared upon the scene with his idolised little daughter Floss perched high on his shoulders.

With one hand he held her chubby legs firmly under his chin, the other, thrown behind him, afforded her a sufficient support, while his hair had all the appearance of being triumphantly crowned, as the tiny hands that clutched it were full of flowers.

"Do for goodness' sake put that child down," said Flora, as they drew near; "what you can be made of to drag her about in such heat as this, I'm sure I can't imagine!"

"We don't find the heat particularly overpowering, do we, Floss?" said Colin, placidly, as he gently lowered himself to the grass beside Mignon, and set Floss's feet upon the ground; "and we're very happy, aren't we?"

"We're very 'appy," said Floss, looking across her father's head at her mother, with that half-impudent, half-alarmed defiance that is so ludicrous when exhibited by mere babies to those whom they know to be set in authority over them.

"I cannot understand how it is," said Mrs. Dundas crossly, "that every one of my children should drop their h's as they do. They never hear me drop mine, and I am always most particular in engaging my nurses to ascertain that they speak correctly; but it is all of no use, for neither Taffy, Colin, nor Floss have got one single 'h' between them!"

"It saves a lot of trouble, doesn't it, Floss?" said Colin, around whose neck his little daughter's arms were now clasped in a throttling embrace. A very wilful blooming little rose was she, her face a tiny and absurd copy of her mother's, but with a heart like her father's beating bravely in her breast.

"How can you talk such nonsense to the child!" said Flora languidly. "Really, it is not to be wondered at that you have no authority over the children, and that I always have to punish and keep them in order myself!"

Flora's notions of the management of children were extremely simple, and resolved themselves into two processes—spoiling and slapping. When they were good, and looked handsome enough to be a credit to herself, she would indulge them just so far as such indulgence did not interfere with her own personal comfort; when they were naughty or tired, or unsatisfactory in any way, she slapped them, and between these two extremes she never hesitated for a single moment. The

workings of the infant minds given over to her keeping were puzzles that she never dreamed of trying to solve.

Colin understood all about it, and could talk nonsense to them by the hour. But, O careless mother, it was wise, tender, gentle nonsense that it would have been well for you, could your lips have brought themselves to utter . . .

"Floss shall be taught the ten commandments without loss of time," said Colin gravely, "and then perhaps she will better understand her duty to her father. Meanwhile, if the question be not an impertinent one, do we interrupt a cabinet council? If so, we will retire, and come back when it is over."

"We were talking about the approaching exodus," said Flora, "and I have been discoursing in vain to Mignon on the varied delights of Glen-luce, for—what do you think? —she says she is not going!"

"Not going!" repeated Colin, in tones of amazement, and turning quickly towards Mignon, "and why not? Are you afraid that—that you will not be comfortable with us?"

"Don't trouble yourself on that point," said Flora tranquilly; "I have not been ill-using the child, and we never fight; she can't go, because she is expecting somebody!"

"But can't you bring whoever it is with you?" said Colin with real anxiety, for independently of his firm friendship for Adam, he liked this girl; the two had been friends from their first hour of meeting, and he had looked forward to having them both to brighten the not too lively Glen-luce.

"No," said Mignon, drooping her head, "I cannot bring

that person with me, and I must stay here; but Adam will not mind going without me, I am sure——"

"Go without you?" said Flora, her voice rising a little higher with every word, "and leave you here alone?"

"Yes, why not? I have Prue to take care of me, though what harm is likely to come to me at Rosemary?"

"Oh!" said Flora ironically, "I don't know of anybody who is prepared to eat you up at a mouthful, and of course it is the most natural thing in the world for a young man to go away and leave his bride of a few weeks all by herself! Indeed, I have little doubt but that you will be able to carry out the arrangement, as, if there is one reasonable amusement on earth that Adam has the sense to enjoy, it is his shooting."

"Of course, he will not go without Mignon," said Colin, trying to keep the disappointment out of his voice.

"I am by no means so sure of that," said Flora decidedly. "However, wonderful to relate, here he comes, so you can ask him for yourself."

"But I do not wish him to remain with me," said Mignon earnestly; "I shall be rejoiced for him to go; it will be a change for him, and——"

"What is Mignon going to be so rejoiced about?" said Adam, throwing himself down on the grass beside Colin, and giving Floss's downy cheek a pinch.

"At the prospect of remaining at Rosemary all by herself," said Flora, with a shrug; "for she says she is not going to Glen-luce."

"She is expecting somebody," said honest Colin, at which

his wife frowned, laughed, and then looked at Adam to see how he took the remark.

He was looking at his wife, marking how

> "A paleness beauteous as the lily's mix'd
> With the sweet violet's, like a gust of wind
> Flits o'er her face . . . ."

There was an instant's pause, then he spoke.

"It would be strange," he said calmly, "if my wife should wish to go to Glen-luce, since I remain here. I have work that must be done, and cannot spare the time."

One person alone, of the three who heard, believed him to be speaking the truth. She clasped her hands with a gesture that might have been relief, disappointment, or surprise.

"Well," said Flora, drawing a deep breath, and addressing Mignon, "I should very much like to see Colin give up his shooting or anything else for me. Not that I complain—fortunately I am not selfish; and though, of course, I should infinitely prefer taking the children to Cowes or Scarborough, that they might have the benefit of the sea air, still I hope I know my duty as a wife, and, what is more, do it."

"Ah!" said Colin, who was tying up a nosegay for Floss with a dry wisp of grass.

Flora glanced sharply at her husband, but he appeared so absorbed in his task that she looked away again.

"Mignon's duty in this case is identical with my own," said Adam drily, "so I need not call upon her to make any sacrifice on my behalf. When do you go, old fellow?" he added, turning to Colin.

"On the 10th."

"Poor Miss McClosky!" said Flora maliciously; "she will be in despair! Half a loaf is better than no bread, and doubtless she would prefer seeing the married man to not seeing him at all."

"You have no right to talk about Phillis in such a manner," said Colin indignantly. "A better girl never breathed; and I won't hear her name taken in vain, the sonsie, gentle, wee body."

"Her name is Phillis?" said Mignon eagerly.

"Yes," he said; "and it exactly suits her."

Phillis . . . what a pretty old-world name. To Mignon it brought up the picture of a fresh, rosy, dimpled country maiden, with something coy and winsome about her, not usually associated with our notions of the daughter of a cotton-spinner.

"Phillis would not deny the soft impeachment if she were here," said Flora serenely. "I do believe that if she tried to tell a good big story it would choke her on the spot. She is a little fool who doesn't know her own advantages; for, in spite of that terrible red brick mansion, and McClosky *père*, she might, with her quarter of a million of money, and little dollish, presentable person, marry almost anybody."

"And what is Mr. McClosky like?" said Mignon, who seemed to have been steadily asking questions ever since she got up that morning.

"I can compare him to nothing on earth but his house!" said Flora, fanning herself with vigour. "The latter is of red brick, that makes you glow all over to look at on the

coldest December day, and it matches the colour of his cheeks and nose exactly; while the pale-blue satin furniture in the drawing-room (where the carpet is deeply, darkly, beautifully red), seems expressly made to extinguish his vacuous, rolling eye. The only difference is that his crest, which is upon everything—over the mirrors, on the cornices, the door-handles (on the very bottoms of the chairs, I do believe, if one only had the courage to surreptitiously examine them)—is not emblazoned on his back, though the jewellery he wears stands sponsor handsomely for the *brickabrack*, as he calls it, in his drawing-room!"

"Poor Phillis!" said Mignon softly.

"When it was all completed," said Flora, "he walked about with his hands under his coat-tails, saying to everybody, 'Everything very plain, ma'am, but—neat.' It did remind me so of 'Neat, but not gaudy, as the Devil said when he painted his tail pea-green.'"

"Nevertheless," said Colin stoutly, "not even a red and blue drawing-room, a yellow and green boudoir, or a ballroom tastefully arranged in pink and mauve, can vulgarise Phillis. In her plain gown, without an ornament or scrap of finery, she holds her own bravely enough, and not one of the high-born lassies who go there can put her out of countenance. The only mistake was that she should have been born a rich girl, instead of a moderately poor one."

"Oh! it is all very fine," said Flora, with trenchant emphasis, "for those people with whom money is a mere drug, a superfluity, to affect to despise it; but just let them be without it for a little while, and then see if they would

talk in that ridiculous fashion! For my part, short of death, I know of nothing more agonising than to be constantly wanting things one can't get. Talk about a good conscience, why, a good fat purse is twice as comforting and conducive to sound moral feeling; and for my part, I can't understand rich people doing wicked things. I'm sure I could be perfectly good and amiable if I had everything on earth that I fancied!"

"No doubt!" said Colin, adding, as he rubbed his cheek against his little daughter's, "nevertheless, we know of something far worse than a pocket without any money in it, don't we, Floss? And that is to put our hand in, and find no sweeties!"

Floss shook her head gravely and sighed; that was bad, and no mistake.

"I'se got an 'ole shilling," she said, patting his cheeks lovingly, "and you sall 'ave it all. P'r'aps mummy let us go to Lunnun t'morrow to spend it?"

"Oh, Floss, Floss! you are a very extravagant young woman with your one shilling!" said Colin. "Now, do you know that if you came into a fortune to-morrow of say a pound, all in sixpences, you would become a perfect little screw, and drive Colin and Taffy away with ignominy when they came to borrow a penny or twopence of you?"

"Really," said Flora with contempt, "I do wonder at your folly, Colin; you will make the child just as whimsical and ridiculous as yourself!"

Colin turned his head, which was on a level with Floss's, and looked at her. The smile on his face was reflected in

the many dimples of hers, but he did not speak; there was never any need for speech with these two; between the somewhat weary man of thirty-six and the joyous fresh young child of four, there existed a very perfect understanding. Worn out and disgusted as he often was by the follies of his wife, he could find it in his heart to forgive her all, when the touch of his daughter's tiny hands was about him, when he looked into those innocent crystal clear eyes and found in them nothing but absolute purity and love.

His heart might have grown arid and bitter but for this cool and quiet shadow that the child made in it, and through his love for her he became a better, more patient, and self-denying man than he had been without her.

A little silence followed on Flora's petulant apostrophe to her husband.

Adam was looking at Mignon, noting all too plainly the weary droop of the slender figure, the enforced patience of the empty hands, and the outline of features almost as colourless as the gown she wore.

Colin, too, was regarding his wife attentively, and wondering what had happened that morning to ruffle her usually placid brows. He knew her thoroughly, this wife of his, her follies, her weaknesses, her over-weening vanity, her profound selfishness; he was vexed by her, his heart was wrung by her every day of his life, and yet—he loved her.

There is something noble and pathetic in these silent heroes who stand so staunchly by their trumpery bargains, only thankful if the world do not see the rents and stains, the coarse veneer and tawdry gilding, as plainly as they

themselves do, who utter no complaint, give no sign, and are by the world in general accepted as poor sightless doting fools.

"Here is father!" exclaimed Flora in tones of consternation; "his face is as long as my arm; he has a bundle of formidable papers, his very waistcoat looks as if it is primed and loaded with dry-as-dust facts that will assuredly give us all moral apoplexy! I fancy I hear baby crying—indeed, I am sure of it"—in a moment lace, work, scissors, and thimble were rolled securely up, and with that nimble dexterity which is one of the especial prerogatives of the fat ones of the earth, she had glided round a corner, and was lost to sight in a moment.

CHAPTER XIII.

"*Julia.* His little speaking shows his love but small.
Lucetta. Fire that is closest kept burns most of all."

"MAN proposes; God disposes."

It was not disposed that Flora and her family should depart for Glen-luce, with her husband and father, on the 10th.

On the morning of the 9th Mignon, in the midst of one of those struggles with the intricacies of the butcher's book, in which she had felt it her duty to engage since her discovery that Adam was not rich, found herself all at once confronted by the disreputable little person of Colin the

Younger. Always remarkable for the ease of his toilet, he looked to-day as though he had been a butt for the four winds of heaven, and, from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, was about as forlorn-looking an urchin of five as could well be met with on a summer's-day.

"Oh! poor little Taffy!" he said, shaking his head, "he's very ill; got weazles, and such a pain in his tummick!"

"Taffy has got the measles!" she said. "Then mamma won't go to the Highlands to-morrow?"

"No," he said gravely. "Grandpa and father's going t'morrow; we'se not goin'; and mummy's slapped us all round, and sent Taffy to bed."

"Oh, she has, has she?" said Mignon, laughing outright. "Poor little souls!"

Then a thought came into her head that put the woes of Taffy and his brethren out of it, and she jumped up so hastily as to deposit the representatives of butcher, grocer, and baker in a heap on the ground.

'You must run home now, Colin," she said absently; "and by-and-by, if Taffy likes, I'll come over and tell him all about 'Puss in Boots.'"

"That's what I'se come for," said Colin the Younger, practically; "me stealed out all 'lone; mummy didn't know, nurse didn't know, nobody knowed, and I'se to give you Taffy's most pertitler love, and you'se to come over d'rectly; and nurse says he may eat barley-sugar and bistiks, but no candies and no cokoly creams—Taffy says."

"I'll come presently," said Mignon, smiling again; and

then the small tatterdemalion vanished, and she hurried out, at a great pace, so possessed by one idea, that not until she had reached the inner garden, and was actually in Adam's presence, did she recall the fact that the day when she had gone to him with any notion that might come into her head had passed, and that perhaps he would be as much surprised at her appearance, as she was at herself for coming. Adam saw her approaching, and noted how the eager step changed suddenly to a lagging one, how the bright face became clouded and dull, and he said to himself that it was because she had expected to find the garden empty, and was disappointed at seeing him there.

He stood awaiting her, some slight tool in his hand; he wore no hat, and was in his shirt sleeves: so Mignon, looking up as she drew near to him, saw him for the last time in her life as Adam the gardener.

Whither had departed the ample stock of words with which she had started off to him in such a prodigious hurry?

Not one word could she find to say, except:

"Taffy's got the measles."

"Yes?" he said, and waited for more.

She stood, folding a corner of her little apron round and round her forefinger, then took a covert glance at his face, as though in hopes of finding something there to encourage her.

She found nothing; he was awaiting her next words with attention, no more.

"Of course they will not be able to go to the Highlands now," she said, in a lame, hesitating fashion; "at least, Flora and the children will not—but Mr. Montrose and Colin are going to-morrow."

"I suppose so."

"And I was thinking," she said, feeling strangely disheartened, and hanging her head down, "that as Flora and the children will be here, and you will have no need to think me lonely, or be uneasy about leaving me, perhaps you too would go and have a good time at Strathsaye—and may I tell Prue to get your things ready, so that you will be able to start to-morrow?"

"No," he said; "you will tell Prue to do nothing of the kind. Do you think I have a mind like a weathercock," he added, half-bitterly, half-sternly, "that I can change it every hour in the day to please you, Mignon?"

"No," she said gently, "but I cannot help thinking, though you said it was the work prevented you, that it was because of me that you decided not to go, and now that it is all quite pleasant and natural that you should accompany your father and Colin, it is a pity, a very great pity, for you to stay here, for you will be thinking of the shooting every day."

"If ever I am compelled to leave my wife under the care of any one," he said, "I trust it will be somebody more competent to accept the trust than my sister Flora. It seems a hard thing for a brother to say of his own flesh and blood, but I disapprove of her in every way, and consider her a very bad companion for you. Had she been perman-

ently established where she now is, I could not, even fo your sake, have settled in this house."

"She is very good-humoured," pleaded Mignon, "an she does not mean all the things she says; it is only he way——"

"It is a very bad way," he said with disgust. "He choice of companions is in as bad taste as her dress an manner," continued Adam; "all her friends are fops, fools or worse, and her women acquaintances are not muc better. She has a weakness for men of doubtful cha racter—" he paused to look keenly at Mignon, whose eye were downcast, "and, in direct defiance of Colin's com mand, will encourage their attentions, whenever she gets chance. She may even introduce such persons to you." He paused again, closely watching her features for any be traying sign. He had seen Philip La Mert in the Park tha day; he knew his sister to be acquainted with him, and h was burning to know if Mignon had been brought face t face with, or had spoken to, him.

But Mignon did not utter a syllable. Her husband ha once bade her carry her confidences to any one rather tha himself, and she had taken him at his word.

All at once he became conscious that tears were startin from beneath her eyelids, that her lips were taking the odd convulsive curve of fight against emotion that will not b repressed.

He saw these tears with a strange indifference; irritatio of mind had begotten a temporary hardness of heart; he di not feel the smallest temptation to entreat her to dry them

She herself could not have told why she wept, save that all things with her now tended towards tears, as formerly all had tended to joy. Adam turned aside, as though he were anxious to return to his work.

Something of a woman's reticence came to Mignon then, as she choked back her tears and clasped her throat with one little hand to keep down the lump there. "I have displeased you," she said, after some moments of struggle with herself; "somehow I seem very often to do so now; and I am sorry, for indeed I would gladly do all that I could for you, who have done so much for me. . . ."

He did not reply. If her own heart did not suggest to her what she might do to repay him, then he would not tell her; there are some things that a proud man cannot do, and this seemed to him to be one of them.

Shaking her head sorrowfully, she said to herself that he was angry, and she could not be happy when quarrelling with any one. Then a bright idea came into her head, upon which she immediately acted.

With a mixture of anxiety and trepidation, she advanced a step or two till she was close to Adam, then said, "Would you—would you like to kiss me?"

He turned sharply, saw those dewy lips, so absolutely perfect in form and colour, lifted to his own, lips that well might give

> "afresh
> The life she had so tangled in their mesh,"

and having seen them, turned back silently to his flowers.

I feel quite certain that you could all have taken it at the same time if you had chosen!"

Taffy, on the floor enjoying a solitary game of marbles, raised his head at this, and looked about him with an air of complacency—he had taken it first and done his duty; but Colin, who sat up in bed looking miserable, and Floss, who lay tossing about restlessly, had not done theirs at all.

"Poor little souls!" said Mignon, who sat by Floss's side, "I don't suppose it is any pleasure to them to be shut up here for a month! Have you written to tell Colin that Floss is ill?"

"He is coming," said Flora carelessly; "I got a telegram from him just now, to say that he would be here late to-night. He only got my letter this morning; it is perfectly ridiculous!"

Mignon knelt down and whispered something to the child, who at intervals moaned "Papa"... and she sprang up radiant; but the girl softly pressed the little head back upon the pillow, and drew the clothes about her shoulders. She had grown quite experienced in nursing during this past month of illness, and that mother's instinct, which lies dormant in every good and true woman's breast, had awakened in hers. These children had learned to listen for the sound of her footfall as for music, to look for her coming as for sunshine; and Flora, who was ill at ease in the sick-room, and more rarely to be found in it than in any other in the house, was glad enough that Mignon should devote herself to the task of tending and amusing them.

"It is always the way," she said, tapping her shapely foot impatiently against the floor; "as sure as ever there is any fun going on in that old barn, I am certain to be away; and of course, because Colin has got a few presentable men this year, I am planted here dancing attendance on these provoking children! The McCloskys, too, have got a houseful; but by the time I get back, all the shooting parties will have broken up, and the Glen will have returned to its usual state of flatness, staleness, and unprofitableness."

"You won't have to stay here so very much longer, if baby sickens soon," said Mignon, who was tying the ribbons of her cloak preparatory to departure.

"Does he look as if he meant to do anything of the kind?" said Flora, surveying her blooming infant with unqualified disapprobation. "No, no; he will wait until Floss is well, and then he will make a start; and I dare say October will find me expiating my sins here, without a soul to speak to."

And she sailed angrily away. A chorus of small voices was uplifted as Mignon too showed signs of departure.

"You're coming back, auntie?"

"You never telled us the end of the 'Free Bears'!"

"Arty tumming back?" said Floss in tones of despair, and raising her little flushed face from the pillow.

"Yes, yes," she said, sighing, "I'm coming back; and I'll tell you the end of the story, Colin, by-and-by."

Adam, who was standing on the other side of his own gate, in the act of lifting the latch, saw her coming quietly through the adjoining one, and said to himself that no one would ever believe it possible that she had been something

of a hoyden once, or gone riding in a wheelbarrow, so subdued and gentle was she now in all her ways. A step that lagged, a glance but seldom lifted, a voice but rarely heard —were these the tributes paid to him for the care and love with which he had vowed to encompass her?

Putting out her hand to the latch, she started violently as it touched his; then, as he swung the gate back for her to enter, she recovered herself, and made a step or two forward.

"You are going to town?" she said hesitatingly, as she glanced at the great book under his arm.

"No," he said; "I am going for a walk."

"In such heat as this?" she exclaimed. "Along these dusty roads? You will get a sunstroke!"

"But I am not going along the roads," he said, still holding the gate open; "I am going to a place that you would not believe it possible could be in or near Lilytown."

"Is it a cool place?" said Mignon, who had by this time unfurled her umbrella; "is it green, and could one get a real breath of good fresh air there, and perhaps see a daisy or two?"

"Yes," he said, showing signs of moving on, "one could do all that. I will show it you some day, and then you can go and sit there whenever you please, with Prue."

"With Prue!" Somehow the notion of this sylvan retreat in that estimable woman's company did not recommend itself to Mignon's favour.

"Could you not show it me to-day?" she said. Then, seemingly alarmed at her own boldness, added, "I'll promise

to be very quiet, and not disturb you a bit in your reading, and I've got some work in my pocket——"

"Won't you find it very hot?" he said, wishing with all his heart that he had got away a few moments earlier.

It was no pleasure to him to be with her, to look at her; and if her mood were a kind one, why, it tortured him even more than if it were cold.

She saw his hesitation, and with a suddenly heightened colour and trembling lip, walked past him towards the house.

But she had not gone six paces when she was overtaken, and without ceremony made to wheel about, for he had put her hand under his arm, and away they went together, Darby and Joan fashion, each perhaps feeling a little foolish.

She wondered whither he was taking her, as they went along the shady side of the road, and came by-and-by to such a lane as well might pass muster as a country one. It was one of the least known and frequented alleys that led to the park of the great lady of the neighbourhood, and from whence the general public was rigorously excluded; but Adam being privileged to enter, presently drew a key from his pocket, which he applied to a small door in the stonework of one of the great walls, and Mignon, stepping lightly through the opening, found herself ankle-deep in the verdure of a carpet that the shadows cast by the giant trees around had kept fresh as in early spring-time.

He led her on to where there was a corner whence they could—

"In deep dell below
See through the trees a little river go
All in its mid-day gold and glimmering."

"Oh!" said Mignon, clasping her hands, "to think of there being such a place as this, not one mile from Lilytown, and that I should never have known of it until summer is gone, and autumn almost here!"

"I did not know of it myself until lately," he said, stretching himself upon the grass and opening his book. "I have only been here three times in my life, including to-day."

Now that he had acceded to her request, and brought her to all that she most particularly desired, coolness, verdure, daisies, even a brook for which she had not bargained, he seemed to consider that she required no farther care from him, and took no heed of her wanderings hither and thither; though indeed, if he forgot all about her, so did she about him, as she pursued her delighted search for such unsatisfactory wild flowers as early September afforded. Dandelions she found in plenty, or rather those downy puff-balls, that are steady as rocks when fine weather is assured, but at the slightest sign of approaching rain, fly hither and thither, the sport of every wind that blows.

She discovered a slender Aaron's rod, but feared to approach, much less gather it, since it was the swaying centre of a swarm of eager bees, who ruthlessly sucked the sweetness from out of its golden blossoms.

After all, she only got some late-tarrying knot-grass, a few flowers of the great scentless bindweed, some ladies'-tresses,

a stem of the awkward straggling ragwort, and some nodding Quaker's grass. Looking about her, she fancied that such grass as this might in spring-time grow cowslips, or Paigle, as the country folks to this day call those graceful golden-headed beauties, and hitherto she had believed that real cowslips could not be induced to grow within less than twenty miles of London.

She at last came back to where Adam lay, and sat a little apart from him, trying to weave her spoils into a nosegay; but they would not be so woven, so at last she laid them on her lap, and took out a piece of needlework. The pattern was in leaves, and when she had embroidered one, she laid it down and looked at her husband. He was apparently immersed in his book, his brows were slightly knitted, he had the air of a person struggling with some tough fact or legal problem, and book and effort alike seemed out of place in the soft seductive warmth and splendour of this early September afternoon. She could not have learned a lesson to save her life, with those golden motes glancing hither and thither on the page, with an impertinent grasshopper playing at leap-frog over her foot, and with the subdued chorus of nature ringing faintly yet sweetly in her ears. Four stone walls would be infinitely more conducive to absorbed study, she felt quite sure.

And he had only to lift his eyes from that dull page to see the great cool sweep of the velvet sward melting into the bracken, where the antlered-heads of the deer glanced in the sunlight. But he saw nothing, not even a rabbit that came peeping out of his hole and looked at these two quiet people

One thing only is certain, that if the time devoted by Mignon that afternoon to the study of that feature had been spent in arriving at a better understanding with her husband, then her story would not have been what it was.

For though she knew it not, in that hour came to her the golden minute that comes to all, and that decides the weal or woe of almost every human life; came and passed, nor gave one warning whisper that said, "I come . . . I pass . . . I stand by your side . . . stretch out your hand and stay me, for to you I come never again. . . ."

Ay, the opportunity had passed, but in vanishing did it not unconsciously sweep some chord in her heart, else why was it that across her memory came straying a verse of that old matchless song, than which there is not one more exquisite written in the hearts of men?

> "Could ye come back to me, Douglas, Douglas,
> In the old likeness that I knew,
> I could be so loving, so tender and true,
> Douglas, Douglas, tender and true." . . .

She had heard it drummed out scores and scores of times, but until this moment the song had held no meaning for her . . . out of what mystery of sky and earth had it then so suddenly come to her?

> "Stretch out your arms to me, Douglas, Douglas!
> Drop forgiveness from heaven like dew,
> As I lay my heart on your dead heart, Douglas,
> Douglas, Douglas, tender and true."

She wondered what the true story of that song was . . . she

would like to have some notion of the man's face, the girl's . . . she fancied she could picture both, and she closed her eyes to the smiling landscape so long that Adam, glancing at her at last, thought she had fallen asleep. But when she opened her eyes he seemed just as much absorbed in his book as ever, only he had dropped his pencil, and it now lay on the grass between them. She stooped forward, picked it up, and tried to draw a face on her thumb-nail, school-girl fashion, but lead-pencil and pen and ink are very different matters, and she soon gave up the attempt. Then a thought struck her, and diving hopefully into her pocket, her face brightened as she produced a letter. It was tumbled and rather the worse for wear, but on one side there was no writing, and she was about to commence her portraits on a more satisfactory footing, when something aroused her attention, and as she quickly unfolded the paper, her countenance became overspread with one of those painful stinging blushes, that communicate even to the beholder some of their own miserable discomfort.

Adam, apparently unobservant, had been aware of the failure of the thumb-nail portrait, he had seen her produce the letter, but by the extraordinary emotion she displayed, his attention was arrested.

Hitherto, that disease of little minds, suspicion, had found no place in him, but now, aware that there was only one person on earth whose letters could cause her such painful confusion, it occurred to him that this one was probably clandestine, and if so, it behoved him to see it, that she might if possible be saved from the consequences of her own folly.

As he so thought, their eyes met. He imagined that he read defiance in hers, but it really was fear, and fear was to her something strange and new, and accepted by her, as by all young, shy, untried creatures, fiercely. Altogether misunderstanding her glance, he received it as a challenge, and replied to it as such.

As every one knows, when a pitcher is filled to the brim, the slightest touch will cause it to run over. Even so may dissatisfaction accumulate for days, weeks, even months, until the last straw is added, the overtasked strength gives way, and we break out with anger that to the offender appears altogether disproportionate to the offence.

Thus Adam was carried away by greater rage than had ever swayed him, as he said,

"You will let me see that letter?"

She looked at him; but, save that her hand closed more tightly on the paper, she never moved.

"You will give me that letter?" he said, and held out his hand for it.

"And why should I do that?" she said proudly; "it is written not to you, but to me, and it may be that he would not like that I should give it to you to read . . ."

When a man of the lower orders is maddened past endurance by the woman who is only a shade less rough and degraded than himself, it is not his wont to punish her with those sarcastic speeches and keen-edged words that are the weapons with which a gentleman stabs the wife or sweetheart who has angered him; he keeps all his wit, eloquence, and satire, in his fists, and informs her with them

until he has thoroughly conveyed their various meanings to her mind. The instinct that guides the two men is precisely similar; it does but take different forms of expression.

Fortunately for Mignon, this taint of cruelty that is the direct offspring of jealousy, and that debases its origin as much as it outrages its object, was entirely absent in Adam: therefore, exasperated though he was by her last speech, he merely held out his hand for the third time.

"Do not compel me to take it from you," he said.

At that her face flamed up, and with a passionate gesture she flung the letter from her.

It fell almost into his hands; and though he had a mind to compel her to present it in more respectful fashion, he thought he would let her off this time, and proceeded to unfold the paper. The date was June: it was the love-letter that he himself had stolen and afterwards returned to her.

So she had religiously kept and carried it everywhere with her all these months, she could yet feel so freshly about it as to blush at its mere sight and touch.

"You value this letter?" he said, refolding it without having read one word of its contents.

"It was my first love-letter," she said, hanging down her head.

"And I deeply regret," he said calmly, "that I should, by marrying you, have deprived you of the pleasure of receiving many more such epistles."

She looked at him in sudden horror; her lips parted, but no sound issued from them.

It had come at last, this thing that she had feared. All along she had been quite sure that he had married her out of kindness, but now he was going to tell her so.

For many past weeks she had felt his constant care and attention to be withdrawn from her, and had grown chill and sad, for not until they had ceased did she discover how sweet and valuable they were to her, or how much her trouble concerning Muriel was soothed by the watchfulness and thought that had hitherto encompassed her.

Well, he had grown weary of doing his duty gracefully, and since he gave her shelter and food, and clothing, doubtless considered he had done all that was necessary or to be expected of him.

She felt herself turning cold and sick with dread of what his next words would be. . . . Yet, after all, it was she who spoke first, not Adam.

"You are sorry," she said, with trembling lips, "that you burdened yourself with me; and I have seen it, oh, yes! I have seen it for a long while past—and—and you cannot be more sorry for it than I am."

They had both risen, her carefully gathered spoils lay scattered on the ground between them.

"Why did you do it?" she cried, striking her hands passionately together; "you thought to do a very good and noble thing, but it was a fatal mistake, a mistake that we can never undo, for the longer we live the worse it will grow, and it is a terrible thought that only death can stop our being sorry, or set us free from one another."

"You are right," he said quietly, "it was a mistake from

first to last, and before God I swear that if it were possible I would gladly undo that morning's work ; but as it is, and since our hopes of liberation must be far distant, we will try to make the best of a bad business, and go our different ways, neither considering nor thwarting one another. Had you any relative to whose care I might confide you——"

"If only Muriel would come," broke in the girl, wringing her hands in a strange piteous agony, "we would go away together, and you should never be troubled with me any more . . . but, oh ! it will never be the same, for go where I will I shall be bound to you always, and if it were not for that, how happy we might have been. . . ."

Unconsciously her hand tightened on the letter that Adam had long ago returned her; and Adam, perceiving that gesture, and believing it to express vehement regret that she was not free to marry the man she loved, felt himself all at once carried away by an impulse of uncontrollable fury. He snatched the letter from her, he tore it into a hundred pieces, ground them beneath his heel, then turned and strode rapidly away, leaving the girl standing in the midst of the soft woodland beauty, with chill and pallid lips, and heart that fluttered awhile with fear, then sank in her breast cold and heavy as a stone.

CHAPTER XV.

"I dare do all that doth become a man;
Who dare do more is none."

It is a bad thing when a man, sitting soberly down to take count of the failures and successes of his life, is compelled to acknowledge to himself that in his choice of a wife he has made a terrible mistake.

We will suppose that he has not arrived at this conclusion all at once; that he has taken time to consider the matter from every point of view; consequently that the decision which is arrived at without heat or excitement is presumably a correct one.

There are men who will not acknowledge the false steps they have taken, even to their own hearts; it is intolerable to them to have their lack of shrewdness forced upon them, or to stand convicted of a fatal error of judgment. But Adam was not one of those men; he had a way of facing his difficulties as he went, that, while it required some strength of mind in the present, saved him from much trouble and mortification in the future.

There had been slowly growing upon him for some time past a consciousness of this mistake of his, but he had not positively made up his mind to it until the morning that followed the walk which had begun with amity and ended in so unseemly an outbreak on his part.

As he sat with folded arms at the table, his eyes fixed on

the blank sheet of paper before him, there flitted before him a series of *tableaux*, in the first of which he beheld his hour-old wife gazing on her unconscious lover, by whose side she was frantically desirous of remaining, even when her husband bade her follow him . . . the second picture represented the same actors, but this time it was the woman who was unconscious, the man, who gazed down upon her, distracted by love, disappointment, and despair . . . anon the scene changed, and the gazer saw a slim young girl, who, with clasped hands and a passion of earnestness in her blue eyes, asked, "Do you think we shall ever see him again?" And there yet rang in his ears the question put by her to Prue on a subsequent occasion, "If one got married at all, might it not be better to marry somebody that one loved?"

Lastly, and freshest of all in his mind, since he had beheld it but yesterday, was the vision of the same girl sitting on the grass with her lap half full of wild flowers, and in her hand a letter, fondly cherished, while guilty blushes painted her cheeks, and angry defiance flashed from her eyes. Here the series ended; but doubtless there were plenty more in store for him, in which he should cut the same sorry, despicable figure that had been his since his marriage.

The contemptible position he filled was becoming intolerable to him. Once or twice lately he had said to himself that he would throw the whole thing up and go away; then the thought that by so doing he acknowledged himself beaten, acknowledged that the task he had set himself was one that he had neither skill nor strength to perform,

stepped in and held him back. What! abandon with such haste a pursuit to which he had sworn to devote every energy he possessed, to which he had vowed to bring the most entire love, the most inexhaustible patience, and the practice of every delicate and gentle art that would be likely to woo the heart out of a woman's breast? Well, there are some things a proud man cannot do, there are positions that a man of self-respect cannot be expected to fill, and he was growing weary of striving to wear his cap and bells gracefully; and while he would have moved heaven and earth to win her when he believed that her love was a treasure no man had yet won, the same efforts went terribly against the grain with him now that he thought he possessed evidence of her passion for Philip La Mert.

And the bitterest part of the whole thing was, that the fault lay with himself.

He had not behaved fairly towards her; he had been absolutely dishonest in the advantage he had taken of her youth and inexperience. He should have waited, should have given her time to learn her own mind before, instead of after, her marriage, have won or lost her in fair fight; instead of which, he had hurried her; and, now that she had grown more wise, she despised him for it.

It had begun badly . . . it had ended worse. The deception he had practised on her was bringing forth bitter fruit, and though good might at first have appeared to come out of evil, it was not really so. No edifice can rest securely on a shifting foundation.

If it were not for the belief he entertained that Philip was

the destroyer of Muriel (although of this he had no proof, and might be altogether mistaken), he thought it might have been better that Mignon should have married him; for of this man's love for her there could be no doubt, and he had grown weary of wickedness, and, influenced by her, might have led a better life, especially as she . . . loved him——

"Why, man alive!" said Colin, entering suddenly, "what on earth is the matter? Have you got a murder on your mind, or are you only meditating one?"

Adam's brow relaxed, his clenched hand straightened itself; but none the less honest Colin, as he sat down opposite his brother-in-law, shook his head with very real concern.

"You're all wrong, old fellow," he said; "look as if you meant going in for a fever, or something of that sort. What you really want is your feet on the stubble, and your favourite gun in your hand. It's your Highland air you're pining for, and it's my belief you'll be no better till you've got it."

"That is out of the question," said Adam, rising and going to the window. "You see I've work to do, and——"

"Ah, yes—well—too much work is bad for you"—here he looked keenly at Adam, then shook his head again, unobserved by the other—"and you're not used to it, and—and we miss you awfully at Glen-luce; even your governor seems really vexed you're not there—and we have a very pleasant party of fellows; Phillis, too, is holding a small court, and I've never known the place more jolly. Come back with me to-morrow, stay a fortnight, and then return to your work, freshened up and better in every way."

"I can't leave my wife here alone," said Adam, but with a momentary hesitation in his tone that Colin instantly detected.

"What harm can she possibly come to?" said Colin. "She is from morning till night with our children; and I should think Prue would be a perfect dragon where she is concerned; and—you won't think me intrusive or taking a liberty, old fellow, but women are sometimes best left to themselves for a bit—they're full of fancies, poor souls, and often don't know what they want, or what is good for them, and——"

Here his flounderings came to an end, and Adam, turning from the window, in spite of himself, burst out laughing.

"All right, old man," he said; "I'll think it over, and let you know this evening. How's Floss?"

"Not particularly bright, poor little soul. And don't think about coming, but come," he added, as he took his departure.

After all, Adam had a great mind to go. . . . At that moment the temptation to get clear away from the carking worries that embittered his life, was well nigh irresistible.

An intense longing was upon him for the free air on his own hills, for the pleasant stir and bustle of his favourite sport; above all, for a complete change of air, scene, and companionship, that would restore the tone to his nerves, and shake the cobwebs from his weary brain.

And then, having almost decided that he would go, the thought of leaving Mignon entirely alone, and with no better

guardians than Flora and Prue, caused him to ask himself if he were mad to think of thus abandoning her.

Philip La Mert might appear upon the scene, although that was scarcely probable, as only a week ago he had seen an announcement in some paper of the departure of that gentleman for the Continent; or Flora might obtain the society of one of those objectionable friends in whom her soul delighted; or bad news might come to Mignon of her sister, and there would be nobody by to soften the blow to her. And yet these objections rose one by one, simply to be set aside. Of evil intent to Mignon, Adam firmly believed Philip to be guiltless, and for many reasons it was improbable that he should desire to place himself in her way. As to Flora's acquaintances, she would find it a difficult matter to discover one within fifty miles of London, and as to Muriel, he had his own reasons for believing that she would not approach Mignon.

"Our first and third thoughts," says Dugald Stewart, "will be found to coincide."

It was in accordance with this theory that Adam presently rang the bell, sent for Prue, and desired her to have everything in readiness for his departure early the following morning.

Prue returned to her mistress and acquainted her with the orders just given. Mignon received the intelligence without uttering a single word.

* * * * * *

In the dead of the night Adam suddenly awoke with a start, and a conviction that something unusual had hap-

pened, or was happening. Had he heard the touch of a hand upon his door, or the sound of a footfall on the gravel without, or did some voice call upon him in that urgent imperative whisper that suffices to awaken the deepest sleeper? He could not tell.

Springing from his bed, he went to the open window and looked abroad. He could just make out the outlines of the trees and bushes; but in the garden nothing stirred, and the midnight silence was intense and unbroken. And yet he was certain that the sound by which he had been awakened was an unusual one. There is within us some vigilant quality only exercised when every other faculty is at rest, that permits all ordinary sounds to pass unheeded while we sleep, but instantly sounds the alarum when anything unusual or fraught with danger to us is at hand; and Adam never doubted that he had been awakened by some cause that it behoved him at once to ascertain.

He hastily dressed himself, and, softly unlatching his door, went out into the passage, which was in total darkness. Noiselessly proceeding along it, he came to Mignon's door, and, with a start of fear, found that it was a little way open—usually it was closely shut.

He hesitated a moment, pushed the door open, and entered. His heart was beating violently; he could have faced the most frightful danger with a cooler hand, a steadier pulse than he now boasted; the ugly feelings of the assassin or the thief seemed to be upon him as he advanced to the centre of the apartment and looked around him. Then, as he looked, he forgot himself in a keen sensation of relief.

Whatever the sound might have been that awakened him, it was not caused by Mignon, who lay asleep, her face disclosed by the subdued light of a taper that burned on a little table by her bedside.

She was there—Adam had no occasion for uneasiness concerning her. Having assured himself, therefore, of the fact of her safety, why did he not retire as noiselessly as he had entered?

He had said to himself that very morning that he did not love her—nay, that he would not have her love if he could . . . but to-night the veil of deceit fell from his heart, and he knew that the choicest good that earth contained for him was bound up in that lovely sleeping maiden yonder . . . How young she looked, how innocent! no more than a child that has fallen asleep with a smile on its lips, and not a care or a thought for the morrow. . . . He crept a pace or two nearer, knelt beside her, then saw with a pang how dark were the shadows under her eyes, how thin the little hand had grown, that slender blue-veined hand, with its mockery of a circlet, shining upon it!

He set his lips against her hand with a touch no rougher than that of a feather might be; but, light as it was, the touch sufficed to scatter her dreams, to unseal her blue eyes, and as, half-waking, she stretched out her white arms towards him, he fell face downwards on the ground, lying hidden in the shadow of the bed. "Muriel!" she murmured, "Muriel!" then sighing, she sank into slumber again—

> "Self-folding, like a flower
> That faints into itself at evening hour."

* * * * * *

At the same moment that Mignon in her sleep uttered her sister's name, a woman who stood without in the garden, her face turned upwards to the window in which the faint light shone, stretched out her yearning arms towards the unconscious girl.

"You are safe, my beloved!" she whispered ". . . in the keeping of one who loves and will guard thee . . . safe!" . . . She bowed her head upon her hands, shaken by an agony of longing, then stretched out her arms again, crying, "If I might come to you, my heart . . . my heart . . . if I might come to you . . . ." She shuddered, drew her cloak more closely about her, as though the night winds chilled her; then, with a last look upwards, and a voiceless prayer, faded away in the half-light like a shadow.

Thus, love's vigil kept over her from within, from without, Mignon slept; and they who watched knew not how powerless was the love of either to shield her from the fate that was creeping upon her, nor guessed that never had she stood in peril so dire as that which menaced her now.

A little longer Adam knelt beside her; then, lifting one of those long bright tresses, that flooded all the pillow with their sunshine, to his lips, he rose and went quietly away. So, in the time to come, he saw her, always a girl, with the innocence of girlhood on brow and lip; nor could he ever picture her as any other than she looked that night.

CHAPTER XVI.

"One torment spared
Would give a pang to jealous misery
Worse than the torment's self."

"If I had only known what it was going to be," said Flora, wiping her eyes with indignant energy, "I never, never would have married!"

"There, there," said Colin, putting his arm round her, "don't cry, Florry; you won't be here for long, you know," and he essayed to stem the tears that drenched, but could not dim, his wife's blooming cheeks.

"I ought not to have to stay here at all," Flora sobbed; "indeed, I consider it perfectly ridiculous that I am not going to Glen-luce with you to-day. Taffy and Colin could easily have come, and Mignon would have taken care of Floss—the child cares to have nobody else with her, so that, so far as I can see, my remaining here is not of the smallest use to anybody!"

"Then it ought to be," said Colin gravely, as he took his arm away from his wife's shoulders. "It is time we started," he added, turning to Adam; who just then made his appearance; "but where is Mignon?"

"It is early yet," said Adam indifferently, "and I would not have her disturbed."

"How considerate of you!" said Flora ironically; "nevertheless, is not that Mignon herself yonder?"

They were standing close to the gate outside which the

carriage waited, and at that moment there came through the adjoining one a little figure in white, which at sight of Flora and Colin shrank back as though dismayed. Recovering herself, however, Mignon advanced, her colour changing, her eyes downcast, full of a proud and wistful trouble too deep for tears. She had thought to find Adam alone, she did not know even whether his great dislike of her would permit him to say one word of farewell, and perhaps he would shame her before his people; but be that as it might, her gentle heart forbade the thought that he should depart without a God-speed from her . . . he had been her friend once, her benefactor always, and however cruel he might be now, she could never forget that.

"You are only just in time," said Flora, taking out her watch and looking at it. "You have ten minutes" (to Colin) "in which to catch your train. Good-bye!"

And she held up her cheek to be kissed. But Colin was not attending to her; he was looking at Mignon.

"Perhaps you'll change your mind," he said kindly, "and come with Flora and the children, though indeed it is a very great pity that you are not coming with us to-day——"

"It is rather too late to recommence that old argument," said Flora serenely; "meanwhile don't blame me if you arrive at one end of the platform just in time to see your train whisking out at the other!"

"Well, good-bye, Mignon," said Colin, giving her hand an affectionate squeeze, and then—and then—it was Adam's turn to wish her farewell, and for one miserable moment

it seemed to her that he meant to go away without one word.

But no—all at once she found her slender hand in his, and was it by chance or of a purpose, that in that hand there lay a tiny knot of flowers, no bigger than a shilling, of which the meanings were all kind and gentle, for she had learned their language, and understood it? His own hand closed so amply over both, that neither of the onlookers could have told of her poor little peace-offering hazarded and accepted; then, the hand-clasp over, Adam stood alone, "Good-bye, Mignon," he said.

Her lips moved, but uttered no sound; she was indeed on the verge of wild words and weeping, but this he could not know, as he turned away, and with a word or two to Flora, seated himself beside Colin in the carriage.

"Good-bye!" said Flora, as the horses started, "and don't forget my love to Phillis!" she added to Adam as he leant forward, looking to the last for that glance from Mignon, without which, he said to himself, he should take but a heavy heart to Scotland that day.

"I won't forget," he said mechanically, his eyes still fixed on Mignon. To his dying day he never forgot the pattern of the gown she wore that morning, or the fashion of her hair; but the secret that her eyes guarded was a secret to the last, for not until the carriage had disappeared did she stir or look up. Then she turned and walked soberly enough along the garden path by Flora's side, who was far too full of her own woes to take notice of those of anybody else.

But Mignon heeded not Flora's flights of eloquence: six words were ringing in her ears that had summarily checked the tears that just now had seemed imminent—"Don't forget my love to Phillis!"

And why, pray, should that message have been entrusted to Adam, not to Colin?

No doubt he would give it her . . . was he not now on his road to her, to this girl upon whose sweetness and tenderness he might well be glad to repose himself, seeing how profoundly wretched was his married life. . . .

"Adam will see Phillis every day?" she said, breaking in abruptly upon Flora's grumblings, much to the disgust of Mrs. Dundas.

"I suppose so," she said indifferently; "indeed, I should say they will be inseparable, they were always very good friends! Are you growing jealous?" She paused to look sharply at Mignon. "If so, I am disappointed in you! I have quite admired your method of keeping Adam the gardener at a distance, and even gave you credit for being an apt disciple of Miss Porter!"

"And who was Miss Porter?" said Mignon, turning her head aside.

"Don't you know? 'Sir,' said Dr. Johnson, 'it was a love-match on both sides. ir, she had a notion that a woman of spirit should use her lover like a dog.'"

"But he is not my lover," were the words that sprang to, yet did not pass, Mignon's lips.

But aloud she said, "And why should one not treat a dog well? It is only a bad and cruel heart that takes advantage

of a dumb, defenceless brute . . . And I have never treated Adam, no indeed, in a bad way. How could I do that when he has been the best friend to me that a girl ever had?"

"He is a very excellent person, no doubt," said Flora, shrugging her shoulders; "unfortunately these highly respectable people are extremely difficult to fall in love with—as you evidently find it."

"Nevertheless," said Mignon softly, "he attracted—Phillis!"

"She is a little fool," said Flora placidly, "and just as ridiculous in her ideas as he is—they would have suited each other well, I am sure. Not but what I dare say you and he will manage after a bit to 'worry along,' as Mark Twain says, as well as the rest of the badly matched married people in the world!"

They had reached the house, and Flora, to whom the study of the concerns of any one but herself was inexpressibly fatiguing, resorted briskly to her own woes.

"Now that we are up," she said, "I should like to know what we are going to do with ourselves at this unholy hour? Talk about the early bird getting the worm; I heartily agree with Dundreary, the more fool the worm to be up so early!"

A footman entered, bearing the morning's letters, which he handed to Mrs. Dundas. Mignon was in the act of leaving the room when an exclamation from Flora arrested her steps.

"What do you think?" she cried, her face beaming with smiles. "Élise (my most intimate friend) says that Mr. Colquhoun, who is one of the shooting-party at Marley, told her yesterday that I was the very image of Lely's portrait of the beautiful Lady B—— at Hampton Court, one of the most famous beauties of her time! There is a nasty simper about most of that man's pictures," she added thoughtfully, "I hope there is not one about this—not that it will bear the least resemblance to me, if it has! I must go and see it" (with animation). "I shall not rest until I know whether it is a compliment or a libel. Supposing we go this very afternoon?"

"Why not this morning?" said Mignon quickly, upon whom there had fallen a great longing to be out in the open air and alone with her own thoughts. Once arrived at the Court, it would be easy enough to give Flora the slip.

"At this time of day?" said Flora, looking mistrustfully out of the open window, as though the beautiful fresh morning were likely seriously to disagree with her; "why, the place will not be even open!"

"But Bushey Park will," said Mignon, almost feverishly, "and the carriage will be back from the station in a few minutes, and it would save a lot of trouble to go now——"

Vanity carried the day. In five minutes (for like all handsome people she never took the length of time over her toilette that a plain woman invariably does) Flora, all impatience to behold Lady B——'s portrait, had announced to

the astonished coachman her intention of proceeding immediately to Bushey Park.

As they went along the familiar way, it seemed to Mignon that a great many years must have elapsed since she drove in a van, and dodged the French governess beneath the chestnut trees.

And when at last they came to that imperial avenue which the girl had last seen in its splendid array of rosy white and pearly red—a sight that she had deemed one to be held fast within the memory when even faces had faded from the recollection, that, too, was in nowise the same; nor did the morning seem to her so exquisite as that spring one when she had met Philip and taken the first step towards accomplishing her destiny.

"We may as well get out and walk up the avenue," said Flora, in a dissatisfied tone—dissatisfied that she had not received one glance of admiration throughout the drive, and her vanity was absolutely clamouring for nourishment. Afar off, beneath the trees, she had discovered the figure of a man, that even at this distance bore a presentable air; she would see if in passing she could not make him look at her.

Mignon was looking about her in search of the precise spot where she and Lu-Lu had so distinguished themselves. Had she passed it! But no! it was a little further on, and . . . and who was this who came slowly towards her, his eyes downcast, his bearing listless and weary, as worn and sad and weary a man as ever walked abroad in the early morning? Still without looking up, he approached more nearly, was

"I have met him," said Mr. La Mert.

"We heard that you were abroad," said Flora.

"I have been and returned," he said absently, his mind busy with the riddle that Mr. Montrose's sister should introduce him to Mr. Montrose's wife. Could it be possible that she knew nothing of his love-suit to Mignon, or of other and more perilous matters?

Flora, too, was asking herself what on earth had come to this man?

"He is taking his misfortunes to heart with a vengeance," she said to herself contemptuously; then asked whether he was going their way, in such fashion that, having no excuse ready, he walked on with the two young women.

A child's touch would have drawn him onward, or plucked him back. . . . with one half of his soul he longed to look at Mignon, to hear her voice; with the other he dreaded her, not as the girl that he had so loved, but as the sister of the woman he had cruelly betrayed, and as the possible avenger of that woman's fate.

For days he had been dwelling near her, the one burning question upon his lips that it was imperative he should ask her, yet had been unable to summon sufficient courage to ask it, and now that he was face to face with her, it seemed more impossible still.

Nay, when the opportunity came half an hour later, he thrust it from him, to Mignon's confusion and despair, and the manner of his refusal was in this wise.

In the midst of Flora's search after the charming Lady

B——, at which Mr. La Mert had assisted with so much politeness as to cause her to reverse her hastily-formed decision on his dulness, he became aware of a soft little hand upon his arm, and turning quickly, discovered Mignon's lovely troubled face looking into his own.

"I want to speak to you," the girl said in a whisper; "but she must not hear us. Can we not watch our opportunity and give her the slip?"

The schoolgirl expression fell oddly from her lips, the request was odder still. One would have said that he was thoroughly aware of its strangeness as he withdrew his arm from her touch, saying sternly, almost fiercely:

"No, Mignon, no!"

He would not lose this one hour of her company, of her kind, sweet, unconscious looks and ways; it might be the last, the very last, occasion that she would regard him without hatred and loathing; the evil future was all too well assured to him, but this one precious hour was his, and he would not let it go!

Mignon's hand fell slowly by her side; the eager light faded out of her face, leaving it pale and chill . . . she had so longed for him, so reckoned on him, and now . . . he troubled himself about her no longer, he had grown weary of her, as had all the rest.

"I have found the picture," said Flora, swooping down upon the pair with an angry rustle of her sweeping skirts, "and it is nothing more nor less than a gross libel. The eyes are brown, not grey, the mouth is at least two sizes larger than mine, and she has only one dimple, and that is

in her chin! I shall tell Mr. Colquhoun when I see him that the next time he goes hunting for chance resemblance, he had better take his spectacles and his wits abroad with him!"

CHAPTER XVII.

"The spirit culls
Unfaded amaranth when wild it strays
Through the old garden-ground of boyish days."

"You frightened him," said Mrs. Dundas, tying her bonnet-strings with calm decision. "In polite society, my dear, young women do not request men whom they have never in their lives met before, to retire with them into quiet corners for private conversation! I saw a look of positive fright on the poor man's face when you asked him to go with you to the Maze, indeed, I may say he almost clung to me till we got back to the carriage!"

Mignon, who stood at the window, prayer-book in hand, attired in a fresh Sunday morning gown and bonnet, made no reply, unless a blush can be accounted one, so Flora proceeded at ease with her oration.

"There is no greater mistake than to fasten on to a man," shaking her head; "he always likes to be a free agent, and the moment he feels he is bound to do a thing, he shies away from doing it. I should not be at all surprised if he has not called here because he is afraid of your making a dead set at him; though if you had not been in

such a hurry to jump down his throat, he might rather have admired you, for you are possessed of two recommendations to his favour; you are fair, and you are married; nevertheless, he is the last man in the world to pardon such a lack of *savoir faire* and experience as you displayed a week ago!"

She glanced complacently at her own reflection, looking at herself first over one shoulder, then over the other.

"If I were not a very amiable person," she continued, as she drew on her gloves, "I should be extremely angry with you, for what could be more irritating than to be bored to death here as I am, and to know that a charming man is close by who, but for your stupidity, would be coming to see me every other day? Such a splendid opportunity as I have got, too—Colin, father, and Adam all away!"

"By the way," she added, "have you been writing to Adam?"

Mignon shook her head. Apparently her husband found it as difficult to write to her as she found it to write to him; perhaps he too had begun and left finished more than one letter; perhaps he had never thought about the matter at all.

"If you should be seized with a fit of affection," continued Flora, "don't mention Mr. La Mert in your missive, or we shall have Adam the Gardener's substantial form flying back on the wings of the wind, and bad as our existence is, we don't want his company to make it worse."

"Perhaps Phillis does not find his company so unbearable," thought Mignon, as she followed her sister-in-law

downstairs and out into the quiet road, along which folk were passing who went to church every Sunday of their lives.

"Nothing could possibly have fallen out more delightfully for seeing something of the poor fellow, if you had not scared him out of his wits," said Flora, taking up her parable. "Did I not say to him, 'We are two forlorn women dying of *ennui*, without even the distraction of quarrelling with each other, and with both our husbands away?' and could a stronger inducement possibly be offered to such a man as Mr. La Mert? I shall never get another such chance as long as I live!"

"But he said he would come," ventured Mignon, blushing guiltily, "and it is only a week ago; he may make his appearance yet."

"Not a bit of it!" said Flora, closing her parasol with emphasis as they reached the church-door. "He has probably gone abroad—he never stays long in one place; we are not in the least likely to see him again!"

"Not in the least likely to see him again!"

These were the words that Mignon carried in with her through the church-door, that rang in her ears as she knelt and tried to pray, that stared at her from the open book that lay on her knees as she sat waiting for the clergyman to begin the service.

Flora having arranged smelling-bottle, foot-stool, and prayer-book to her satisfaction, proceeded to look out for possible new bonnets and unlikely new men.

She usually brought her two sons, making their small

souls sick within them as they sat bolt upright, and
venturing to wink, lest sleep should overcome and ei
them a sound whipping later in the day. On one occ
Floss had been brought, but as she inquired in awe-st
tones of Taffy, "Is that Dawd?" when the clergyman ent
in his white robes, the experiment had not beer
peated.

Flora's glance, roving from face to face, presently alig
upon one that communicated to her a smart shock of a
ishment and pleasure. Mignon, sitting at some dist
very pale and still, became all at once aware that an i
ence was at work upon Flora which had set all her airs
graces in full play, and looking about her for the cause
held Philip.

He was looking at neither of the young women
had already seen Mignon enter, marked her weary
and attitude, and now, his head bent on his hand,
thinking. . . .

"When the wicked man turneth away from the sin
he hath committed. . . ."

Mechanically he stood up with the rest, and abs
asked himself when and where he had heard t
words last . . . and did the service always begin
them?

It had not occurred to him to bring a prayer-book
deed, it would have puzzled him to know where to
one.

By degrees the rufflings of Flora's plumage ceased;
grew sulky, and would have liked to pinch somebody.

man did not even see her, whereas formerly he had not required to be told when a handsome woman was sitting at a distance of forty yards from him; nevertheless, she found one crumb of solid substantial comfort in the thought that there he was, and there he was likely to remain for the present, and it should go hard with her if he got away from the church without her intercepting him. Whereupon she sank on her knees with slightly recovered good humour, having first ascertained that Mignon was minding her book, and apparently doing nothing whatever to attract his attention.

The girl, too, was hugging to her breast the thought that presently—but ah! surely, surely, she would speak to him once more, walk by his side, and hear his voice, and she, too, could afford to wait patiently until the service was over.

And Philip, his head still supported by his hand, his eyes fixed on the dusty stool at his feet, was recalling how Sunday after Sunday, when the first fever of his love-fit was upon him, he had come to this church, and, himself unseen, watched Mignon at her prayers in the great empty pew that stretched away to right and left of her, while Prue, vigilant as any dragon, sat behind her in another just as long and dreary.

Through the dark night of his gloom and discontent, the girl Mignon had pierced like a sunbeam, and perhaps because he had met her first with the bonny flowers of the May morning over her head and under her feet, he associated her afterwards in his own mind with all things

fragrant, sweet, and lovable, whereas that other to whom his love was due, had gradually come to be inseparably connected with the thought of annoyance and weariness. For the latter had committed the unpardonable sin of wearying him. A woman may storm, lie, deceive, be inconveniently fond of, or immoderately jealous of, a man, and he may forgive her all these sins and many more; but once let her make him thoroughly uncomfortable, and all is over; so long as she lives she will never regain her empire over him.

A man cannot always be in heroics; he wants something more satisfying and less fatiguing. To the woman who places him on good terms with himself, and who never worries him, he will be faithful to his life's end.

Now the poor creature who stood in Philip's mind for the exact antithesis of Mignon, could not rest contented, but lived always in a fever of remorse and shame that made peace or comfort impossible to her, and drove away all chance of anything but misery for herself and her fellow-sinner. Day by day the chain that bound them grew more and more heavy, day by day they sickened of each other's society, and they looked ahead to the life that they were doomed to drag out together, and at each other, with loathing.

Nevertheless, Philip had then no thought of turning back; he had promised to marry her when he should be free, and he would keep his word to the letter . . . or so he had always said to himself until a certain morning in the month of May. Looking back upon this time, many things became cl[illegible]

him that had then seemed dark, and he understood now why Muriel had prevailed upon him to go to that little place of his, unvisited for years, whence she could steal now and again for peeps at her sister, whom she dared not seek openly until in the eyes of the world she was—"an honest woman."

As he sat with bent head, unconscious of the risings-up and down-kneelings of the worshippers around him, his heart grew hot with anger as he thought that if Muriel's pride (ever a great barrier between them) had not been so intense and morbid that he had never been able to draw from her one word concerning her relatives, this miserable compli cation would never have come to pass; that then he would have loved Mignon as a sister, not with this fatal love that had already entailed upon his soul guilt, the full measure of which he had not as yet ascertained.

He raised his head and looked across at Mignon, regarding her from an entirely new point of view. It seemed to him that he should never again get back to the first impression he had of her . . . At the present moment he was seeking in her face for a resemblance to her sister. No, there was no resemblance. Features, colouring, expression, even dimples, were all different; a man might see the two girls side by side and never dream that the same blood ran in the veins of both. As he looked at Mignon, her face faded, and another rose before him in its stead—a face young, fresh, more beautiful even than Mignon's (though not in his eyes), and but a few years older, the face of one who had sacrificed herself for him, and to whom—a poor return for

the wasted treasure of her youth, innocence, and beauty—he had vowed a vow, and then dishonoured himself for ever by breaking it!

Where was she now, and to what fate had she hurried away on that day when she found his diary, and discovered his love for another woman? He had not needed to tell her of his contemplated baseness, she had discovered it for herself, and in her agony, and heeding not that she herself destroyed the last chance of returning to her sister, she had disappeared from his sight, and though he had sought her in many lands, and though at that very time detectives were seeking in every great city in England and abroad, his search had been vain, and of late he had come to believe that neither he nor Mignon should see her face again, for that she was dead.

And if it were so, then he would never dare to take Mignon's hand again, or speak her name . . . he would go his way, a man who knew himself to be a murderer before God, and Mignon's fate would be to watch and wear her life away for the sister who could never come.

But if Muriel were found, if she would accept at his hands the tardy reparation he offered her, then there might be some scanty store of peace for him in the days that were to come, and perhaps, after a long while, Mignon might find it in her heart to forgive him.

He had returned hither, not to see Mignon, but because he had a conviction that if Muriel were living she would probably be coming from time to time to steal a look at her sister. Perhaps Mignon had news of her . . . could assist

him in his search; and so, having failed to summon up courage to pay that promised visit to Mrs. Dundas, of which mention has been made, he had come to church that morning with the determination of no longer postponing the evil day, but of seeing and having speech with Mignon, if she so willed.

The ordeal must be faced; why not now as well as at any other time?

And then he wakened with a start to the fact that the pulpit was empty, that the church-goers had departed, that he was sitting all alone with empty pews before and behind him, and that a pair of blue eyes were looking into his, while the sweetest voice in all the world was saying in a whisper, "Flora says, are you going to stay here for the afternoon service, or don't you think it would be pleasanter to come back with us to luncheon?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

"And when I came to feel how far above
All fancy, pride, and fickle maidenhood,
All earthly pleasures, all imagined good,
Was the warm tremble of a devout kiss . . ."

In the churchyard without, Flora impatiently waited and wondered, and asked herself, was the man mad, or was she, to so trouble her head about him?

But when he came through the doorway at Mignon's side, hat in hand, his eyes looking as though the sun had got

into and dazzled them, she forgave him all his sins on the spot.

"Do you do sums in church?" she said laughingly, as their hands met, "or were you digesting the German idea, that in the next world all inefficient clergymen are condemned to read the bad sermons they have preached in this?"

"I was doing neither," said Philip; "but I fear I am not a good subject for church, or at least so three old women seemed to think, who prodded me rather violently in the back, and rapped me at intervals on the head with hymn-books!"

"They found all your places for you," said Flora, as they passed through the churchyard together: "but you neither accepted nor returned thanks for their kindness!"

He had recovered himself; he had served too long an apprenticeship to playing the fool not to be able to do so again on occasion, and Mignon, as she followed the pair, asked herself desperately what chance should she have of speaking with him alone that day?

At Mr. Montrose's door Flora, entering, was surprised to find that her companion did not follow her, and he, turning and coming face to face with Mignon, was startled in his turn at the emotion the girl's face betrayed.

Flora, vigilant and impatient, cut short any words that might be about to pass between them by crying out, "Luncheon waits, and, like Gilpin, I am faint and—and" (blankly) "you mean to say that you actually cannot stay?"

"I have an engagement in the neighbourhood," he said;

"but with your permission I will call later in the afternoon." And before Flora could recover her breath, he had raised his hat and was gone.

He had intended to enter, he wished to get his interview, that inevitable and painful interview, with Mignon over, but at the last moment there had come a violent revulsion of feeling, and it had seemed to him that it would choke him to eat bread in Mignon's company, to be a guest at the table where she sat, when if she knew all she would count the whole world not wide enough to place between them.

"It could not have been you that time," said Flora, as she sat five minutes later at luncheon. "Do you know I actually believe he thinks it improper to come here while we're in this husbandless state, though if he's going to take to the proprieties in his old age, then all I can say is, more's the pity!"

"But he is coming back?" said Mignon, looking up hastily.

"So he says!" remarked Flora; "but did he not make the same engagement the other day, and may he not fail to keep this one as he did that?"

"I wonder," said Mignon, walking to the window and looking out, "I wonder what time he means by late in the afternoon?"

"Are you plotting to get him all to yourself, you ridiculous little babe-in-the-wood?" said Flora, laughing outright. "Let me warn you, then, my dear, that I do not intend to give you a chance of having your infant mind corrupted by Mr. La Mert's gallant speeches! By the way, how do you like me

in this dress? Don't you think that new pale-green one suits me better? This makes me look rather stout, which I am not."

And she revolved slowly before Mignon's abstracted eyes.

"It looks very nice," said the girl, recovering her wits with a start; "but I think—yes, I am sure, I like the other one best." And then she sighed, not at the thought of Flora's gowns, but because she saw her chance of speech with Philip becoming more and more remote. She stood for a long while without stirring after Flora had gone to be re-arrayed, but started into life as the faint sound of approaching footsteps fell upon her quick ears.

Apparently, Mr. La Mert's engagement had been a short one; at any rate, there he was at the house-door, and finding it wide open, and no servants about, stood hesitating for a moment on the threshold. At that moment the dining-room door gently unclosed, and Mignon stood in the aperture.

Placing her finger upon her lips, she went forward on tiptoe, and, taking him by the hand, drew him into the drawing-room. With her disengaged hand she softly closed the door, then led him to a chair, drew one close to him for herself, sat down on it, looked at him, clasped her hands together, and gave the biggest, deepest, longest sigh any young woman ever heaved who was untrammelled by tight stays, or held in check by the usages of polite society.

"You must not speak above a whisper," said the girl, "or she will come down directly. She is putting on a pale green gown, and—and—I hope there are dozens of buttons, for

we are not likely to get such a chance as this again for ages; and oh!" (here the whisper was abandoned for the round, vigorous notes of hearty self-gratulation) "I never in all my life was so glad to see anybody as I am at this moment to see you!"

Philip's perception of humour was not very great; nevertheless, the irony of the situation could not but strike him.

One of those ungovernable impulses that now and again possess people, urging them to some word or act that to the onlooker savours of madness, impelled him to burst into sudden, discordant laughter, and ask her did she know who and what he was, that she received him with so many manifestations of joy?

The moment of danger passed, but left him so pale, that Mignon forgot herself to exclaim with concern, "You are ill—suffering?"

"Ay . . . I suffer . . ." he said below his breath; aloud, "I am well enough. Do you not know," he said, with a strange smile, "that there are two persons in the world of whom it is never safe to speak—yourself and your enemy?"

"But you are ill," said Mignon, putting aside his speech; "and—and—you do not look happy," she added; then, frightened at herself and her boldness, averted her eyes from his face.

Hitherto he had not looked at her, but now he did so, unwillingly, painfully; then a sharp pang ran through him as he saw how changed she was, how pale and thin she had grown . . . and this, too, was some of his work.

"And you," he said involuntarily, "are you happy?"

A sudden colour flamed in her cheeks. "How can I be that?" she said swiftly; then her eyes sank, her colour faded, she sighed, in such fashion that one who understood such matters would have said, "This girl's heart is full of the vague yearning and trouble of love, but as yet she is unconscious of it, and more prone to resent than acknowledge its influence."

"I fear we are none of us very happy nowadays, Mignon," he said sadly; and then the girl's heart filled with a pity that most assuredly he did not deserve.

"Forgive me," she said gently; "I had forgotten . . . but perhaps it may all come right to you, as to me, some day."

"What do you know of my happiness or unhappiness," he said harshly, "of my past or of my future, Mignon?"

"I heard your story," she said simply, and with her head still turned aside, "and—and I saw your wife once, and I was . . . sorry for you."

She was sorry for him! He bowed his head in his hands and groaned aloud; and the girl, with mingled fear and wonder, noted how grey his hair had grown, how impossible it now was to complain that his eyes were too blue and his hair too black!

He lifted his head with reckless courage.

"Have you received any news of your sister?" he asked.

"Have not you?" she cried.

"I?" he said, in slow, measured tones. "And why should I be likely to do that?"

"Then you have brought me no news of my darling?" cried the girl, wringing her hands. "You have come to me empty-handed, when I have been so longing, so praying, to see you again, because I felt certain you knew something of, could tell me something about, her . . ."

"I have nothing to tell you," he said.

"From that day . . . in the Morgue . . . to this," said Mignon feverishly, "you have not heard one word of her, good, bad, or indifferent?"

"I have not heard one word."

"You are a man," she cried wildly, almost fiercely; "you are free to go where you will, to wander half the world over; and if you had possessed one grain of pity for a poor girl who may have been wronged, betrayed, forsaken, you would have asked, you would have inquired, you would have gleaned some scraps of information about her. But you are like all the rest—you do not care. Nobody cares what may become of her but me . . ."

Mignon, catching sight of his face, paused abruptly in her reproaches.

"I beg your pardon," she said, humbly; "God knows it is not for me to take you to task, or to say you should do this or that . . . she was nothing to you, why should you? Only somehow I have had a feeling all along, ever since that day, that you took an interest in her, that you were sorry for her, that you had met, and perhaps spoken with her in Dublin, and once or twice it has occurred to me that perhaps she might have married somebody that you knew, perhaps even some friend of yours?"

Some friend of his! Would Mrs. Dundas never come Would he have to sit here for ever undergoing the terrib ordeal of this girl's cross-examination?

He had prepared himself for something bad, but not f this.

"What question is she going to put to me next?" he aske himself, as she sat facing him, her fingers nervously inte laced.

"Sir," she said, at last, desperately, "can you tell me my sister be married?"

He was staggered for a moment by the blow, then he sai doggedly:

"I cannot tell you."

She went resolutely on.

"But you knew her—in Dublin?"

"Yes."

Though he were convicted of his sin the next moment, h could not have answered her, "No."

"You saw her?" cried the girl, springing forward; "an was she well—happy?"

"She seemed both."

Ay, that was true enough, at any rate, she had been— then.

"Perhaps you would not be likely to hear of it," she said drooping her head, "but did you ever hear that she had— sweetheart?"

"Yes."

"And he wanted to—to marry her?"

'He could not marry her then," said Philip, lookin

downward, and becoming a deeper villain in his own eyes with every word he uttered; "but afterwards . . . when he became free, it was his greatest desire on earth that she should be his wife."

"Then that explains everything," cried the girl, a great light of joy breaking over her face; "her silence—her letter—all—even the strange questions she asked Miss Sorel about my suspecting her, and the promise she made that she would return to me at the end of two years. . . . She was afraid that some gossip or other might reach me, and she wanted to guard against it, and Miss Sorel, and—others—misunderstood her, as though I might not have known that no harm could ever come to my beautiful, proud Muriel, whom everybody loved. . . ."

She turned suddenly to Philip. The contrast of her transfigured lovely face to his was striking, but she was too full of her own joy to heed his looks.

"I was angry with you just now," she said; "I was so bitterly disappointed, for, you see, I did not know what precious news you were bringing me; but I hope you will forgive me, and I thank, I bless you, for having made me so happy, as she will when she comes, and I tell her all about you. . . ."

When she came! . . . he bent his head lower still. How long, how long was this agony to continue?

"God forgive me," she said, looking upwards, "but I have had hard thoughts of this man whom Muriel loves. I have even grown to think of him as her enemy, and all the time—all the time, he loved her, all this long time he has

been faithful and true to her always. . . . I might have known that no one would have had the heart to wrong my darling, least of all the man whom she loved. . . ."

Philip could bear it no longer, he started up, crying vehemently, "He is a bad man, Mignon, a bad man! He is utterly unworthy of Muriel's love, and your good opinion——"

He paused; his heart aching as he saw all the sweet colour, all the new-found joy, dying out of Mignon's face, leaving it pale and chill.

"A bad man!" she repeated mechanically.

"Ay! I know him!"

"He would not be kind to her, you think," she said, trembling, "and perhaps it is all his doing that she has not written, or sent one word to me all this long time?"

He turned aside; he had meant to prepare her somewhat for that which might be in store for her, but he could not; it was beyond his strength to dash the colour from her rainbow hopes, to leave her here, to the long and empty days of waiting, with a heavy foreboding heart — no, let what might come after, she should keep this one hour of gladness.

"Mignon," he said very sadly, "do not part with your bright hopes, and, if you can, keep still your kindly thoughts of this man, who, if he has sinned, has also suffered . . . suffered. . . ."

He pressed his hand suddenly against his side, his face took a greyer shade—how old he looked, how desperately weary and miserable!

"Muriel would not love him if he were a bad man," said the girl, "and it is a very easy thing to say of a man that he is bad; yes, because it is not possible for any one to look into his soul and see what is there, and I have been told before now that men are bad, whom I have found good, with true and gentle hearts. . . ."

She paused, changing colour, and he understood why she had paused.

"People have told you so of me, for instance?" he said.

"I did not believe them," she said gently, "and if they were wrong about you, why should not you be wrong about him? . . . I want you to make me a promise," she added, lifting her imploring blue eyes to his, "and then I shall be able to sit down and wait for her here with a good heart . . . Flora has told me that you go about the world a great deal, never stopping very long in one place, and of course you must see a great many people, therefore there is a good chance, is there not, that sooner or later you may find her or him?"

"And if I do," he said, trembling, "what then?"

"I know it is a very great favour to ask of you," she said, "but I want you to promise me that if you should see her, you will come straight away to me here, whether it be by day or night, and say, 'I have found her—come!' And I will follow you, if needs be, to the world's end."

He sprang up, the beads of sweat standing on his brow. She asked him . . . this?

It was beyond his strength: he would not take this vow;

he shrank before the task of coming to her with his own condemnation on his lips, for one of those shadows that go before a great misfortune lay on his heart then, and told him that when next he saw Muriel it would be for evil, not for good.

"Ask me some other thing, Mignon," he cried fiercely, "but not that, not that!"

"Is it so great a trouble to you, then?" said the girl piteously. "It might happen that she is alone in a strange land, or sick, or miserable, not able to come or send to me, and if you knew it, you, who have seemed to be her friend and mine always, would it be kind of you not to let me know?"

If ever she were sick or sorry . . . if . . . and at this very moment she was wandering, homeless, and Mignon sought to exact this promise from him, when she believed her sister to be well guarded and cared for. What, then, would be the vehemence of her demand did she know the truth? Ay, his manliness, his honour, his duty, all compelled him to take this vow upon him; it was a part of his punishment, and he would not shrink from it.

"You promise?" she said, her eyes full of a child's unquestioning trust and sweetness, fixed upon his averted face.

"I promise," he said.

A rustle of silken flounces, an exclamation of astonishmen, a faint perfume of lavender-water, and, armed *cap-à-pie*, entered Flora.

"Upon my word!" she says, each syllable falling on the

ears of the listeners in sharpest notes of ejaculation, "and may I ask how long you have been entertaining Mr. La Mert?"

"How long?" says Mignon, turning her eyes on Philip with an assured friendliness that still further exasperated Mrs. Dundas. "How long would you say—half-an-hour—more?"

Flora positively gasped, less perhaps at the girl's assurance than at the new vivid, bright beauty that had come to her, and that made this chit more than a match for herself, *savoir faire*, superior colouring, Parisian gown, and all!

"The children are waiting for you," she said coldly; "they have been expecting you all the afternoon."

And she sank into the chair, drawn suspiciously close to Mr. La Mert's, that Mignon had just vacated.

"Good-bye," said the girl, holding out her hand to Philip; her eyes giving him all the warm thanks her lips dared not utter, "and you'll come again soon, very soon, won't you?"

CHAPTER XIX.

"How the blood
Left her young cheek; and how she used to stray
She knew not where, and how she would say nay,
If any said 'twas love, and yet 'twas love,
What could it be but love?"

SQUALLS had set in at Mrs. Dundas's present abode, the weathercock pointed to "Stormy," and whippings, slaps,

and punishments were as plentiful as blackberries in season.

Flora was bored to death, and Flora had been wounded in her only vulnerable point, her vanity; and as she always made a point of passing on to other people any inconvenience she might herself experience, she contrived to make the whole household extremely uncomfortable. One person only appeared perfectly indifferent to her humours, and came and went as before, heeding her not at all. Flora regarded her sometimes with an angry wonder, for the girl seemed to carry some charm that rendered her impervious to outward influences, yet keenly alive to those inward ones that painted her cheek a lovely red, that brought fire to her eyes and lips, that, in short, supplied the one thing necessary to make her beauty irresistible—expression.

One would have said that some new influence had crept into her life and coloured it, that some feeling was growing in her heart that caused her mingled joy and pain, but that the sweetness outweighed the unrest, the sure and certain hope, the timid and trembling fear.

And Flora, troubling herself about no intricacies of hidden feeling, concerning herself merely with this girl's suddenly revived brightness and beauty, looked at her—and wondered at this hitherto despised schoolgirl, who no longer merged her own identity in hers (Flora's), and who dared to assume day by day those adorable airs and graces that beautify a woman when she has just made the discovery that she has a heart, that she possesses the power of charming, and that some one loves her. Mrs. Dundas's sole consolation was

that if all these signs were occasioned by Mr. La Mert, then he was proving himself tolerably indifferent to them, since he had not repeated the visit made on that Sunday afternoon when Mignon had behaved with a dishonesty that awakened in Flora all the just resentment of a noble nature.

"Of course, my opinion is of no value," she had said loftily, and swooping down on the girl so very quickly after Mignon's own exit from the drawing-room, as to convince her that Mr. La Mert must have cut his visit very short indeed; "but when I was your age, I should not have dreamt of entertaining a young man all by myself, especially when I was aware that his visit was paid, not to me, but to another person."

"But I thought two was company, and three trumpery?" said Mignon, looking up from the big volume whence she was expounding (after her lights) the parable of the "Marriage at Cana" to Colin and Floss.

"That entirely depends on whom the two may be," said Flora crushingly. "In this case, and judging by Mr. La Mert's face when I entered, he would have found three far better company."

"He was not at all dull with me," said the girl. "Indeed, I am sure that neither of us were thinking about you; it was only when we heard your dress outside that we even recollected you!"

"I do not wish my daughter's morals contaminated," said Flora, her face supplying all the colour that her gown lacked; "therefore I beg that in her presence you will not converse with such freedom concerning your impropriety of conduct."

"Oh dear!" said Mignon, bursting into a hearty laugh, "poor Floss! She is beginning early!" And then she reverted to the parable, and Flora went angrily away; and bad days began, as I have said, for the young Dundases, and the Dundas dependents.

Fortunately, however, the period of measles was nearly over, and another week would see Mr. Montrose's house empty, and the whole family established at Glen-luce.

Mignon would be left all alone, and yet she did not feel dull at the prospect; on the contrary, the thought elated her, and a letter she received one morning about this time, a mere friendly little letter that all the world might have read, and been none the wiser for reading, and to which she made no reply, since she was to see the writer so shortly, sent her pulses leaping, her heart dancing, so that it was to a strain of music, inaudible to all ears but her own, that her steps moved with so gay a measure.

On this particular day, as she walked with Colin the younger and Floss, beneath the trees, all shining in the sun with the rain that had but just ceased falling, she felt that earth was fair, that God was good, that her years were but a little over sixteen, and that she and the world had a long and perhaps happy account to settle with each other yet. How brave was the red, and brown, and sepia of the leaves overhead! how intense and clear was the light upon distant objects! how keen and sweet was the air!

Muriel was safe—Muriel would not be long absent now. Philip's words had removed from the girl's heart the shadow that had so cruelly darkened it. And she had another secret

source of joy, that she scarcely dared to acknowledge, but which she sometimes guiltily felt to be a species of disloyalty to her sister.

Floss and Colin did not disturb her thoughts; they were indeed industriously engaged in the delightful occupation of walking into every puddle to which they came—a process not particularly favourable to promoting their convalescence, but of which Mignon took no heed.

"And now which way shall we go?" she said, pausing as she came to three roads turning different ways. "Shall we go towards Brentford, or Hounslow, or Hampton Court?"

"'Ampton Court," says Floss with decision; "there's a sweetie shop that way."

And she takes the turning that will end in bull's-eyes without a moment's hesitation, Mignon following.

In due time the bull's-eyes are bought, carefully divided between two people, thankfully sucked, and deeply regretted.

They have got clear away into the country roads now, between the glistening hedges, and with no houses to come between the eye and the stormy blue sky above.

Every pale dandelion that lurked in the dripping grass of the roadside, every diamond drop of rain that flashed high on the bough, every cloud that scudded across the sky, formed to her the question, Yes or No?—Yes or No? And the answer was sometimes the one, sometimes the other, so that she had no more reason to be satisfied with the result of her queries than to despair. Was it possible for the flower of love to bloom for a space, wither, then burst forth again in renewed beauty and vigour? Must not the interval

of frost and starvation destroy the plant, so that when warmth and sunshine should at last return to it, they would arrive too late?

No. True love could never die; it was only the false love that withered away, dependent on outward influences. Did not Parthenia sweetly and truly sing—

> "'And tell me how love cometh?'
> 'Tis here—unsought—unsent.
> 'And tell me how love goeth?'
> That was not love which went."

And if the song were true, then love was to be this girl's portion. It had been hers once—she knew it now; and though once she had spurned the precious gift, might she not, even thus late in the day, stretch out her hand, and gather it to her breast?

"Take care, Arty!" cried the children's shrill voices in the distance, and then Mignon looked up with a start from the ragged cluster of leaves and ferns she held in her bare hand, to see that a dogcart was close upon her; but as she stood aside for it to pass, it stopped suddenly, and Philip La Mert, throwing the reins to a servant, in another moment, was standing by her side.

"I was on my way to call on you," he said; then sent his dogcart back, and walked on by her side.

"Is it not a beautiful day?" said the girl, looking all about her; "do you not like one of these changing, blowing, laughing and weeping days ever so much better than those dead summer or winter ones, when there is no change in all the twelve hours save in the degree of light?"

"It is a beautiful day, as you say, Mignon," he replied, but his eyes rested not on the landscape or heavens, but on her face; and as he looked, he could for a moment fancy that all the miserable events of the past few months were a dream, and that it was but yesterday he had seen and fallen in love with the happy girl who walked by his side. This was no pale neglected wife, no wearily waiting sister; this was the Mignon that he used to love . . . used to love . . . was there ever any past in his love for her; did he not love her infinitely more now than he had ever loved her in those bygone days?

As they walked together, there fell no silence between them, though Philip's voice was but rarely heard. A very Ariel of fancy and play seemed to have taken possession of Mignon that day, and, as Philip hearkened, he likened her dainty conceits and happy talk to the little wild flowers that may bloom on the top of a volcano, that is to all appearance extinct, yet may at any moment scatter death and desolation around. When at length they turned homewards, some of the beauty of the day had departed, and a soft, fine mist was creeping up over the land. They were close upon Lilytown when Philip's eyes became all at once attracted by something unusual in the appearance of Mignon's hand. He was walking on her left side, and the hand that held her autumn spoils was ungloved.

"Where is your wedding-ring?" he exclaimed involuntarily.

She turned her head aside, but answered not a word.

He felt that he must see the expression on that averted

face, so he stepped behind her, and came round to her other side.

Glancing downwards he saw, O ! God help him, and her . . . he saw a look that once seen could never be mistaken —a look that comes but with the first dawn, and blush, and tremble of conscious love. She laid her hand upon his arm, her beauty intoxicated him, her lovely voice sank like a charm into his heart as she said, "I took it off because . . . because . . ." her voice ended in a sigh, her eyes met his, soft and sweet as summer . . . he, still gazing at her, saw, marked, understood, then, freeing himself with a fiercer effort from the spell that bound him, he broke away from her and was lost to sight in a moment.

* * * * *

The mist and the rain had cleared away, the moon, now in her second quarter, showed as a gentle and benignant spirit amidst the wrack of clouds that scudded like phantom snowdrifts across the sky.

Mignon, leaning from her chamber window, half in light, half in shadow, the only creature awake in the sleeping household, looked abroad, and communed with her own heart—the heart that was so full of the stir and throb of a new passion as to make dull the fine spiritual sense that at any other time would surely have informed her of the neighbourhood of the sister whom, until now, she had loved with the unswerving devotion of a lifetime.

For down yonder, in the shadow, crouches a shivering woman, whose uplifted eyes are fixed, with a worship almost savage in its intensity, on Mignon's happy face, while her

poor cold pallid lips are murmuring words of blessing and fondness that surely, surely the girl's ears above might almost catch.

For the first time in her life Mignon was unfaithful to her sister; for the first time her fancy painted a happiness in which Muriel was not the central figure, and a love, even greater than was her love for her sister, pushed the memory of that sister away. I wonder why, when we are happy, and desire to express our joy with special earnestness, we instinctively turn to those old ballads and songs that express so much more beautifully and effectually for us than we could for ourselves, the ideas and thoughts that struggle to find speech within us?

Had any one ever before sung the song that rippled over Mignon's lips, as she mused and dreamed in the moonbeams? No, she felt sure it belonged to her, and no one else . . . sung by no one but herself, and that only one person in the world could possibly understand it, and that was the man to whom she sang it.

> "Could ye come back to me, Douglas, Douglas,
> In the old likeness that I knew;
> I could be so loving, so tender and true,
> Douglas, Douglas, tender and true."

Her voice, very sweet and low, reached the woman beneath. "She is thinking of her husband," she thought, "she is happy . . ."

A little longer and Mignon, extending her arms as though in farewell to the sleeping garden, withdrew from the window and closed it.

A kind of stupor fell on the watcher as the girl vanished; she bowed her face among the dank grass, and lay perfectly still.

"You might have stayed a little longer, my heart . . . my heart . . ." she moaned, "for something tells me that this is the last time I shall watch for you, and that the end is near." She rose, drew her cloak around her, looking upwards once more. "Thank God she will never know . . . never know . . ." then she went slowly away, and never by summer nor winter, in springtide or autumn, came the footsteps of the poor wanderer thither again.

CHAPTER XX.

"O, limèd soul, that struggling to be free
Art more engaged!"

For hours that night Philip La Mert wandered abroad, neither knowing nor caring whither his steps might lead him.

What was this thing that had overtaken him, that had added curse to curse, retribution to retribution, in sheer wantonness of cruelty, until this last, this unimagined evil had come to place the last link in the chain of horror?

He had sinned—ay, but other men had sinned also, and they had gone lightly on their way, neither dreaming of nor being overtaken by punishment of any sort. He had committed a wrong, which he had meant to repair; he had been so dishonourably weak as to turn back from that resolve, but very quickly he had reverted to it, and he was not to blame if it had not been carried out.

To-day, there had fallen to his hand a gift that once he had longed for, sinned for, even, in his own wild fashion, prayed for, but that now was the most terrible, unwelcome guest that ever knocked at the heart of man.

God knew that he had long ago given up coveting it; that when he had talked with her it had been with no thought of winning her love, that it had never once entered into his wildest imaginations that the thing once so sweet and natural, now so monstrous and horrible, should come to pass, that Mignon should love him.

The thought pursued him like an avenging fiend; it drove him on and on through the stormy night, and at length, after hours of wandering, he found himself back again almost at the point whence he had started, standing beneath the trees in Bushey Park. He tried to collect his thoughts, to argue, to reason, but whatever fresh train of thought he began, it always came back to this—Mignon loved him.

She loved him. And at any moment the summons might come through one of those who kept vigilant watch for Muriel, that would compel him, in observance of his vow, to go straight to Mignon and tell her that he had joined her long-lost sister . . . this was his fate, this the errand on which he had pledged himself to go, to the woman who . . . loved him.

To see the love in her blue eyes turn to deepest loathing, to stand before her the man accursed, who had destroyed her sister, to be revealed to her as he was, this was what he had sworn to do—this was the scene that enacted itself before his eyes.

He had vowed a vow once, and had broken it. To just such another trusting, loving girl as this he had vowed, and been forsworn.

Whither were his thoughts leading him? He tried to take a fresh grasp of his wandering wits, leant his back against a tree, and resumed his stare at the sky.

Whose voice was it that had said to him, and that not so very long ago, "No matter what the time may be, whether by day or night, you have only to say to me, 'Come!' and I will follow you, if needs be, to the world's end?"

Mignon had said it, and Mignon . . . loved him? Was he falling asleep, or dreaming? How bitter cold the night was, how eerie and wild the wind! And as a man dreams, and wakens, and falls asleep again to dream differently, he found himself reviewing his position from the point of view that would be taken of it by any average man of the world. He had sinned, as had others; he had been unfortunate as few men ever are. He had been undone by an accident—by the accident that had made two women sisters; but was that his fault, and was he never to know peace or happiness again because Fate had served him so ill a turn?

His mood changed, a wild gladness burned in his veins, that for a time intoxicated him . . . come what might, let the future hold what store of wretchedness it would, this one night was his; for this one hour, though snatched from him the next, Mignon's love, the first, the only love that she had ever given to man, belonged neither to her husband nor to any other man living, but to him.

For to-night, only to-night! Yet a thing that is once be-

stowed is bestowed for ever: nor powers of heaven nc hell can destroy or take away the fact that it once ha been.

Then the fiercest, supremest temptation of his life assaile him, and there raged within him a mortal battle betwee the devils that so long had had possession of him, and th good angel whose pinions were as yet so weak.

And since the good within him was as yet so faint of life while the evil had grown with his growth, strengthened wit his strength, one would have said that the chances wer small but that the evil would win the day.

All that night Philip La Mert wrestled with the tempter all night the battle raged, of which the issue grew eacl moment more doubtful, until daybreak came, when, drenchec with night-dews, he returned to his home, flung himself upo his bed, and far into the day slept the profound sleep o exhaustion.

* * * * *

"Are you expecting any one this evening, may I ask?" inquired Flora, glancing up from her novel at Mignon, wh had been flitting about the room, looking alternately at th window, the clock, and the door, seemingly possessed by demon of restlessness and excitement.

"Perhaps," said Mignon absently, and putting on her littl cloak as she spoke. "Hark! did you not think you hear the sound of wheels?"

"I hear nothing but the wind," said Flora placidly "who would be likely to be coming here at this time o night?"

"Have you ever felt," said the girl, approaching Flora and her comfortable surroundings of reading-lamp, fruit, and coffee, "that something out of the common was going to happen to you; that steps were coming nearer and nearer; that a voice was calling you from a great way off, that would presently grow clear and distinct, and that though you would give the world to cut short the unbearable period of waiting, you must just patiently wait until whatever it was—came?"

"No," said Flora, withdrawing her hand from the little burning one that Mignon had just laid upon it, "I can't say I ever have, neither do I remember hearing of any one but you who did! You are feverish, my dear, and the sooner you go home and to bed the better!"

"I am going," said the girl, in a somewhat calmer tone; then, much to Flora's astonishment, she stooped and pressed her lips for about the second time in her life against her peach-like cheek. "Good-night!"

"Oh! good-night," said Flora, who was not used to making formal greetings or farewells to her family. "Why, one would think you were making your last dying deposition, to judge by your countenance! I suppose we shall see you to-morrow morning?"

The girl had reached the door; she turned, the handle in her grasp.

"I suppose so," she said, "unless . . ." She went away without finishing the sentence, as was remembered—after.

* * * * *

The moon has washed one half of the world all over with liquid pearl; it has made broad, shining walks of dull and

ignoble places, and it has dignified into beauty the homely old garden in which Mignon restlessly paces to and fro, backwards and forwards, her every nerve and pulse strung to the highest pitch of expectation—of she knows not what, yet which some unerring instinct tells her is making its way to her through the night!

Hark! what is that sound that comes nearer and nearer? what is that sharp beat of horses' hoofs that seems to fill the air, and to outrace the beating of a heart that gallops even as they?

They draw nigh, they slacken, they stop altogether.

Some one has arrived, some one is coming; his hurrying steps have passed the outer garden—they have crossed the threshold of the door that divides it from the other—they are here . . .

She takes a step forward, looks, shrinks back; the next moment her hands are caught in Philip La Mert's, and, as face to face they stand in the moonlight, he utters but three words, "Come, Mignon, come!"

"Where is Prue?" cries her mistress, entering hastily from the garden, her blue eyes blank and dull, her face white as the dead. Alas! at this turning-point of her little mistress's destiny Prue is absent; not once in a month is she from home at this hour, but to-night she is absent!

"I cannot wait," said the girl, wringing her hands; "but when she comes back, tell her that I have gone with Mr. La Mert, and that I will let her know where she is to come to me, that I will write——"

And then, as though every moment were of pure gold, she ran down the steps, like one possessed, as the woman afterwards said, and so to the carriage that stood without.

The door of the coach was already open, the girl sprang quickly in, Mr. La Mert took his place beside her, the man shut the door to with a bang, then quick as lightning sprang to his place by the coachman's side; the latter touched his horses, they stretched fleetly out into a gallop; another moment and all have vanished, and the woman is left on the doorstep staring after them, and asking herself is she dreaming, or was there ever such a miraculous moonlight flitting seen upon earth before as this one?

END OF BOOK II.

BOOK III.

HEART.

CHAPTER I.

"He entered in his house, his home no more,
For without hearts there is no home,
And felt the solitude of passing his own door
Without a welcome."

A YOUNG man came springing up the steps that led to his home, looking as handsome, healthy, and happy as bountiful fresh air, sunshine, and three weeks of outdoor life could make him. The tone had returned to his nerves, the stoutness to his heart, he had flung all his morbid doubts and fears overboard.

A pleasant thrill of excitement and masterfulness (for he possessed just then that feeling that usually guides men straight to success) quickened his pulses as he noiselessly opened the door with his latchkey and crossed his own threshold.

It had been his fancy to come upon Mignon thus, unlooked for, unannounced, and now he wondered how he should find her—talking to Prue, or struggling with the butcher's book, or perhaps—who could tell?—actually

engaged in writing to him the letter that he had been half-expecting ever since he had gone away from her.

It was not yet dusk—there was plenty of light by which to find her; and he softly pushed open the drawing-room door and looked around. No, she was not there, for the litter that usually marked her track was conspicuous by its absence; her very work-box was shut (he never remembered seeing it closed before), and set severely against the wall; while the chairs, the piano, the very books had a drearily unused look.

He went into the dining-room; that too was empty, and preternaturally neat.

She must be in her bedroom. He walked upstairs, knocked at her door, and, receiving no reply, boldly entered.

Here, as below, there was not the smallest token of Mignon's presence, not so much as a ribbon, a trinket, or a glove; the flowers on the mantelpiece were drooping for lack of air and water, and the groundsel in the bullfinch's cage was withered.

To his dying day Adam could not have told whether his first foreboding of evil came to him as he looked at the drooping flowers or at the neglected cage, but assuredly it was in his heart as he crossed the room to his wife's dressing-table . . . it fulfilled itself as, looking downwards, he saw on the centre of the china tray before him a plain gold wedding-ring. He stood for a few seconds looking at it without stirring, then he lifted the tiny circlet, and fitted it on the first joint of his little finger. Yes, there could be no

with his own horses and servar
her straight in the garden, for
out, says the coach had but
Mignon come in from the gard
said she, 'Tell her I couldn't st
Mr. La Mert, and I'll write to l
that she ran down the steps, and
says Dorothy, they was gone . .
hour afterwards."

So the whole thing was premed
waiting for her lover, while she
placed in a conspicuous place her
tell its own story.

"Only half an hour . . ." said
"and if I'd ha' been here she nev
have clung to her, followed her, bu
villain she never should. . . . Y
morn, sir?"

"No, I started at [illegible]

sich a beautiful colour into her cheeks, and at last she seemed to get downright happy, jest as she used to be. Oh! master —master—I guessed 'twas because her thoughts were full of you, and jest in watching her I got nigh as happy as she was."

"And while you played in this fool's paradise," he said, with a fury in his voice that made her cower before him, "your mistress was drifting to her destruction. What opportunities would she have had of meeting this man but for your disregard of your duty? And why did not you, who knew what he was, at once inform me of his presence here?"

"I never knew it," said Prue, sadly; "p'r'aps she was afraid I'd tell you; and she were never out alone, unless may be once or twice with the children. 'Twas at Mrs. Dundas's they met."

"At Mrs. Dundas's?" repeated Adam; and then he knew that the instinct that had warned him to keep his wife from Flora's society had been a true one, and he cursed his own folly in disregarding it. At his sister's house Mignon had met this man; at his sister's hands would he require her!

He left Prue without another word.

Flora, whose attention had never in the whole course of her life been distracted from herself for so long a period before, had by this time got over the feelings of amazement and anger produced in her by the news of Mignon's elopement, and was now settling down again into her normal state of affectionate regard for her own self and her own comforts.

Therefore, as she sat in a favourite easy-chair, drawn close to a blazing wood fire, her feet resting on a fender-stool, and a new novel in her hand, she looked, with the pleasant background of the gaily-lit, flower-scented room, the very picture of ease and comfort.

Into this quiet interior of light, fragrance, and luxury strode, without announcement of any kind, her brother.

Flora laid her book down and looked up. Now was her hour of triumph; now was her opportunity for richly revenging herself upon him for the many slights he had offered her, for the many wounds he had given to her vanity, for the superior airs he had assumed, and the cold, steady disapprobation of herself and her ways that he had invariably displayed.

Nevertheless, as she looked at him, there was that in his face which made her colour fade, her eyes sink, nay, her very heart beat with apprehension, as, crossing over to her, he bent that terrible face to hers, and grasping her wrist, said in even, quiet tones:

"I have come to you for my wife! She was left in your charge; at your hands I require her. Where is she?"

For a moment Flora believed that he did not yet know the truth, but the unpleasantness of the task before her arousing her resentment, and some of her hardihood returning, "Am I your wife's keeper?" she said, then quailed again before him, and, for the space of a brief moment, forgot herself.

"She went of her own free-will," she said, speaking under

the force of those compelling eyes, that compelling grasp; "so far as I know, she never saw him but three times, twice in my presence, once out of it; nevertheless, when he asked her to go, she went."

Adam's grasp tightened on Flora's wrist, and his voice grew hard. "Knowing what had gone before, what this man had been to her," he said, "you anticipated no evil from their meeting?"

"Knowing what had gone before?" repeated Flora, in tones of unmistakable amazement. "Why, they never met, to my knowledge, more than three times in their lives! Once at Hampton Court, where I introduced them to each other; once here, on a Sunday afternoon; and once when she was out with Colin and Floss, the day before they ran away!"

"And you did not know," said Adam, "that he had formerly been her lover, that it was at one time uncertain whether she was to be his wife or mine?"

Flora looked at her brother with utter amazement. Here was no acting, as Adam knew; this astute woman, who thought herself a match for most people, was taken altogether at a disadvantage, had been made a fool of by a schoolgirl.

"Why, I introduced them to each other," she said at last; "I told her his whole story from beginning to end, and she never said a word, not one single word, of any previous acquaintance! And I thought her such a little fool," she added, half aloud, "utterly incapable of concealing a thought from anybody!"

"She told you nothing?" said Adam, the deceit displayed

her life until we met him in
went away. Her behaviour
very strange, for I heard he
away from me, that she mig
refused; and indeed, from th
I should be far more inclin
run away with Mr. La M
Mignon!"

"She seemed to like him—
Adam, calmly.

"She never gave him a mon
conviction, and still speaking t
"when he called here that Sun
unknown to me, to entertain hi
knew he was in the house—inde
believe that she actually opened
occasion, so that I should not he

Adam had relinquished his gra
and with her left hand sh

seems (from my cross-examination of the children to-day) she met some one who walked with her all the way, and the description of whose appearance exactly tallies with that of Mr. La Mert. She came here yesterday about eight o'clock, but seemed very restless, and, on her wishing me good-night, I asked her if she were expecting anybody. She said, 'Perhaps.' I then asked if I should see her as usual this morning. She said, 'Yes, unless . . .' and never finished the sentence. She then went upstairs and kissed Floss over and over again, and the next I heard of her was Prue coming round, half-mad with fear and sorrow, saying that Mr. La Mert had taken her away. Now, judging by after events, the only reasonable supposition is, that the elopement was planned and arranged during that walk yesterday afternoon."

So far, Flora had spoken truth, and Adam, in spite of his prejudices, had believed her. But now something of the outraged vanity of the woman who had been hoodwinked and deceived displayed itself.

"He never admired her," she said; "he will weary of her, as he has wearied of all the rest, and, though he is perfectly free, we can scarcely hope that there will be so respectable an issue to the affair as that he will marry her!"

"Marry her!" said Adam, who stood motionless, a grim figure in the midst of the pretty fripperies of the room; then he lifted his clenched hand, his lips moved, he was registering an oath on high.

"She shall never be wife to two men," he said; "he shall take my life or I his . . ." Flora looked, and saw upon his

had evidently retired to rest; repeated and loud knocking, however, presently drew forth a sleepy and reluctant personage, half-dressed, who owned to being the coachman, while his wife, who followed at her leisure, was plainly enough the cook.

Was Mr. La Mert at home?

No, he was not. Master had left the preceding day, or rather night, and they didn't know at all when to expect him back.

He (the coachman) had driven his master to Lilytown the preceding evening?

Certainly, it was his duty to drive Mr. La Mert when he used his carriage, which wasn't once in three months.

Where had he driven him after going to Lilytown?

That was his business. (Hesitation consequent on a meeting of palms.) Well, master hadn't given no orders to him to hold his tongue, and there wasn't much to tell. After taking up a young lady at Rosemary, he'd drove to Brentford Station, and then he got his orders to go home, which he did. Mr. Coles, Mr. La Mert's man, had accompanied them as far as Brentford, and had returned with himself home.

Mr. Montrose would like to see Mr. Coles? This seemed doubtful; he (the coachman) would do his best, but Mr. Coles did not like being disturbed, and he was not in the best of tempers—and would Mr. Montrose come in and wait while he went upstairs?

No, Mr. Montrose would not wait within, but he stood without, apparently as patient as the steaming horse, or the

driver who, with arms folded on the top of his hansom, slept with one eye and ear open.

It was a long while before Mr. Coles appeared, elegantly arrayed, his whole manner and air indicative of disgust at being disturbed in his slumbers at such an hour.

He was not without an inkling of the state of the case, but whereas in previous affairs of the kind his master had treated him with a certain contemptuous confidence, leaving all minor details to him for arrangement, in this instance the confidential servant was as much in the dark as everybody else, and he resented the difference very keenly. For the first time during the ten years he had served Mr. La Mert, that gentleman had managed his own affairs, had absolutely departed on a journey without him, and the vanity of Mr. Coles was wounded.

He could give no further information than the coachman had given. Luggage? His master had taken none. And then, utterly baffled, Adam asked himself, Were they all in a conspiracy to deceive him, did they withhold from him some knowledge that would make of his vengeance a sure and swift certainty, instead of leaving him blindly groping hither and thither, a giant bound by withes.

No; these people were probably speaking truth. Was it likely that their master would wilfully set the pursuer on his track? But as he drove rapidly away he asked himself what must be his next step? He must think, he must contrive, when he was conscious of but one raging thirst, of but one headlong impulse, the thirst to slay, the madness to overtake, the crying requisition of body and soul that he

. . .

The morning was early yet wh
Scotland Yard, and placed in t.
such information as might lead tc
pair.

Having communicated all that
written description of the persc
lady and gentleman, he proceedec

When might news of them be
would be the likeliest in which to se
or beyond?

"They have had time to get ou
the inspector; "in all probability t
the Continent by now, but by noon tc
tions are so liberal) inquiry will be o
ing to the peculiar circumstances
the lady, the fact that they are wit
or two minor things you have menti
we shall in all probability have news
to-morrow. Y

missing valuable information that might enable you to overtake them, and you have about as much chance of finding them as if, to use a homely comparison, you looked for a needle in a bundle of hay. If you will remain close by, within almost instant reach of news, you will have some reasonable chance of success. There is absolutely nothing for you to do but to wait."

To wait! To sit calmly down for days, perhaps weeks, while they two went their way, unhindered, unlet. . . . He stood perfectly still, a battle between passion and reason going forward in his mind; then his stiff hand relaxed, his brows straightened.

"I will wait," he said calmly; and nothing proved the strength of this man more than those three simple words, that, with his blood boiling within him, with each muscle, nerve, and vein strung to extremest tension, he could calmly sit down—and wait.

To wait until a messenger should come to him, when he would rise up and go his way, and do that which he had set to his own right-hand, neither hasting nor faltering, but knowing what would be at the end of his journey—and prepared.

* * * * *

All that day he sat alone in his deserted house, and none came to, or disturbed him, for none durst, until night fell, and brought to him—Colin.

What comfort could this poor fellow offer, what words of healing could he speak, to a man who uttered no railings against Heaven, spoke no word of complaint, but just sat

grimly waiting there until the summons should come that would take him straight into the presence of his wife's destroyer?

The simple words that he had been about to speak died upon his lips; Colin felt himself to be blotted out and swept aside, and not possessing the presumption of those little souls who are abashed at nothing, he was fain to stand silent.

Colin had been importuned and wearied by Flora to take her away out of all this wretchedness and discomfort, for the breath of tragedy sickened her small soul, and she was really afraid of what Adam might do in his haste. She carried her point so far that on the next morning but one the Dundases set out for Glen-luce.

"For God's sake," Adam had said when his hand met Colin's in a farewell grasp, "keep my father away—and don't come back, old fellow; you can't help me, no one can do any good"—and then the two men had looked hard in each other's faces, as not knowing how long a farewell they might be taking of each other, and Adam was left in unbroken silence till the end.

At intervals food was brought and set before him; it remained for the most part untouched, but now and again he ate sparingly, as one who knows that all his strength will be required in the days that are coming.

Prue ventured not into his presence, the weight of his unspoken condemnation lay heavy upon her: yet keener even yet was her sense of personal loss, and, like a lioness robbed of her whelps, she wandered up and down the house and

garden, resting neither by night nor day, fiercely longing to set out in search of her mistress, yet held inactive by the same inexorable necessity that rendered her master powerless, looking out with eyes weary through watching, for the letter or message that her little mistress had promised with her parting words to send.

The poor faithful serving-woman lost all her comely look of second youth, and grew quite grey and middle-aged, in the days that followed immediately on Mignon's departure.

All through the long hours of the day and night the master sat, moving neither hand nor foot, and waited.

A weaker man had been cowed by his punishment; this one rose above and mastered it, nor reckoned his life over because he had gotten a bad blow; rather, he dared to look forward to the time when, his vengeance taken, he would map his future out and do good work in it, finding in the fruits of ambition joys even greater than had been denied to him by love.

So he thought in his ignorance, not knowing that as yet between him and his calamity was reared a high wall, that one breath of human pity, one touch of nature sweeping across his soul, should cause to fall in ruins about him. For the shame of this thing that had befallen him had not yet come home to him. Hitherto, indeed, he had thought little of the woman who had betrayed him.

He had spoken of her, he had provided against her, had acknowledged her existence to himself by so doing, but she had not been consciously present to his mind or eyes.

As an incarnate wrong, as an embodiment of shame, she

found part in his outlook; but as the living, breathing, winsome maiden whom he had loved and married, he knew her not, nor would she ever again be before him in the old familiar guise until the death-throes of his love for her were upon him, until he should look his last upon her ere closing the coffin-lid of memory for ever.

About the middle of the third day, the purely physical hunger to overtake Philip La Mert departed, his eyes were no longer dim with passion, his pulses beat more slowly; yet now that the fever had left him, that he was able to see with the eyes of reason, his judgment deliberately ratified the decision at which his heart had arrived.

He began to observe outward things, recognised the familiar faces of his books—familiar, yet surely absent from his sight for a very long while, and then, with a sudden sharp shock that was the beginning of his awakening, he remembered that he had only been absent from them three weeks that very day.

Only three weeks, he said to himself, with reference to that abstract creation that stood in his mind for Mignon, and she had passed through the great crisis of her life, had apparently found it just as natural to fall into sin at the first opportunity she got, as she had previously found it easy to marry at a moment's notice the man who had come forward to protect her. His thoughts straying towards her were cut short by the arrival of letters. During these three days there had come to him a great many, all of which he had laid aside unread, save those from Scotland Yard, and these too he had, when perused, laid down with a sense of

failure, for let the wording of them be as it might, the matter of each was precisely similar. Not the slightest clue to the missing couple had been obtained; and the matter that had at the first flash appeared so simple as to call for no special skill or address, was fast resolving itself into a puzzle that defied solution.

Mr. La Mert and his companion had been traced to Waterloo; beyond that point all was darkness. It was certain that they had not left England, and in this, the last report received by Adam, he was informed that there was reason to believe they were still in London, waiting their opportunity to get safely away.

In London! Close to him, within reach of his vengeance, and he idly waiting here—the thought nearly drove him mad, and for a space it relit the furnaces of fury in his heart. And yet he knew that to go and search for them in the great Babylon yonder was worse than useless; that skilled seekers were at work; nevertheless, he said to himself that but a little longer he would wait, wearing the semblance of a coward's shameful acquiescence in his own disgrace.

To-morrow, ay, to-morrow, he would rise up, and, no matter how great the folly and uselessness of it, he would himself assist in the search.

It was one of those bright October afternoons, when life seems at its keenest and brightest, when the sun's rays strike one with a sense of tingling and warmth, when the air heartens and freshens body and soul, and every leaf and twig and late tarrying flower stands out vivid and distinct, as though our eyes had suddenly grown clearer, and the world

in which we walk had been hitherto looked at by us through spectacles. But Adam, who was usually so quick to note and comprehend each one of Nature's moods, heeded her not to-day; he could not have told whether the day were fair or foul, and yet it was to affect him; for as he sat fixedly staring at the books and mass of papers before him, a sudden shaft of sunshine, piercing between the drawn-down blind and the window, lit upon and burnished the edges of some shining object among the dusty heap before him.

Mechanically he leaned forward to see what it was, and then he lifted the glittering thing and held it before his eyes.

It was only Mignon's little thimble that he had seen on her slender finger so many times, as it flitted over her needle-work, or, oftener still, remained in mid-air while she talked. Only a little old battered thimble; but the homely familiar thing did that which nothing else had had power to do—it brought the living Mignon up before him, and for the space of a moment he saw her, not as the guilty accomplice of an unlawful lover, but as the merry lovely little maiden, who had eaten his cherries, taught him English history, presented him with half-a-crown, and three weeks ago, in gentle token that, though she did not love, her heart was full of kindness for him, thrust into his hand a tiny knot of flowers. He took from his breast-pocket a minute package, then from another pocket he drew a second, and a third, and proceeded to unfold them. The first contained what had been a small bunch of flowers, the other a plain gold wedding-ring, the third a bright new

half-crown. These he laid side by side, and for some seconds sat looking at all three.

Then for the first time it all came home to him—all the shame, the sin, the loss, and last and greatest of all, the pity of it.

The mists of passion and revenge no longer obscured his vision, the veil that had for a time been mercifully drawn between him and his calamity was torn asunder. Now was the hour of his weakness and suffering to begin, and before it he fell, helpless and unresisting as a child.

He neither abased his head nor stirred, but sat staring straight before him at the half-crown, the ring, the withered flowers, in his eyes the strained agonised look that in a man out-weighs in its piteousness all the rivers of tears that have ever been shed by women. Hitherto he could not truly be said to have suffered. The first stunning blow of misfortune had been so instantly followed by the overmastering longing for revenge, that his sense of personal bereavement had been in abeyance; but now he suffered.

This woman whom he had called his own, who had borne his name, shared his home, dwelt by his side, had left him for Philip La Mert.

In name, at least, she had once been his; she was now Philip's . . . the first fact had been washed out in the last, which was eternal; for come what would, happen to Philip what might, she could never, though both dragged out their lives for a hundred years, be anything to him again.

He might slay the man who had betrayed her. Ay! but would that give back to him his lost Mignon?

He might punish, but he could not undo; he might destroy, but he could not restore; all the vengeance on earth could not make void the terrible deed that Mignon, not knowing, had committed.

For she knew not that Philip, the last, the most fatal, of all men upon earth that she should have loved, was he to whom was owing the ruin of her sister's young life, and when she awakened to that knowledge, as all too surely she must awaken some day, whither would she turn, and what would become of her in her extremity, since she had no friend in the world save him whom she had outraged and forsaken? Surely, surely she would come creeping homeward to the only home she had ever known, as do all spent and wounded creatures—to die!

For it was only a question of time and accident; nay, when this man wearied of her, might he not tell her the truth with his own lips, and so rid himself of her in a moment?

Still gazing before him, as the shadows fell in the quiet room, and the books before him grew faint and indistinct, Adam seemed to see this Mignon, a lonely and pathetic figure, unconscious and innocent even in her ruin, wandering, as a child may, into peril, smiling, unsuspecting, happy, until the great gates of sin clanged heavily behind her, and she awoke by slow degrees to the consciousness of the thing that she had done.

Muriel's chance of salvation, Philip's one hope of self-respect and reformation, his own strong life and hopes—among these the girl had lightly moved, shattering all, her-

self the only unconscious actor in the tragedy. O God! help her, when her awakening should come . . . when the mists fell from her childish soul and eyes; when she discovered that by her own act she had consigned to never-ending shame the sister she had so deeply loved, that their two hearts had seemed to make but one between them!

It was quite dark now, but as in letters of fire written before him, he read his own self-condemnation, and hearkened to the stern reproof spoken by his conscience. Bad as the thing was, said his mentor, was it not of his own doing? Had he not taken advantage of this girl's inexperience and forlorn position to surprise her into the false step of becoming his wife, leaving her not a moment in which to take counsel of her heart or learn her own mind, and when he had obtained her, instead of carefully watching over and protecting her (aware as he was of her girlish fancy for Mr. La Mert), had he not deliberately left her, without one word of warning, exposed to the temptations and wiles of a man whose life had been spent in the practice of beguiling foolish women's hearts from them?

She was but a child; she ought to have been cared for as such; he should have been gentle with her, instead of which he had been harsh, even violent, scaring her into that refuge of all weak creatures—deceit, and driving her to repose herself, when the opportunity arose, upon one whose love seemed to assure to her love and protection. And yet this deceit, this palpable premeditation on her part of the whole affair, did not tally well with his conception of her innocence and transparent simplicity of character.

Her absolute silence to Flora on the subject of her previous acquaintance with this man, her meeting with him on the very morning of his own departure, her interview with him when he came to the house, her subsequent walk, and the fact that she knew her husband might return any day, and that therefore time for action was short—did not all these circumstances point to the conclusion that she had all along nourished a guilty feeling for her former lover, and that his arrival upon the scene had supplied the opportunity for her yielding to the ever-present temptation?

Nay, if Flora spoke truth, Mignon had deliberately striven to attract this man to her own undoing; with the untutored instinct of a child, she had looked, longed for, and stretched out her hand for the forbidden fruit, heedless of all, so that she grasped it securely.

"What if he had misread her from first to last? If that upon which he had poured out his whole love was but a dream-woman created by his fancy, while the reality was this poor and miserable thing, then he should surely thank God with all his heart and soul that he was rid of her—that the first-comer should have been the touchstone to test her lightness or her purity, and so rid him of her for ever. . . . And yet . . . and yet . . . her face rising up before him as he remembered it last, pure and child-like in her slumbers, shamed him in his thoughts.

There came into his mind those exquisite lines of one of the good Hare brothers, that had always appeared to him to be written for, to exactly typify, Mignon—

"Leaves are light and useless, and idle and wavering and

changeable, they even dance, yet God has made them part of the oak. In so doing, He has given us a lesson not to deny the stout-heartedness within, because we see the light-someness without."

He had watched her growing up, he had jealously hearkened to her every word, because he knew how often the fairest face is belied by the heart within; and from first to last he had found her a school-girl indeed, and over-young for her years, but emphatically "without guile." He had even fancied he saw growing up in her one by one the delicate blossoms of those "seeds of truth which exist naturally in our souls;" and he had believed that the instincts of such an one could not possibly lead her far astray, but that she must inevitably turn towards the light, obeying the voice of her heart.

There passed in array before him every kind look she had ever given him, every gentle word that had fallen from her lips, every hue and tint that she had ever worn; and through the silence and darkness of the room he seemed to hear the patter of her little feet coming and going—nay, the very touch of her slender hand crept out of the void, and fell upon his like a flower, and once more he felt upon his lips the fleeting kiss that she had so rarely yet so lightly laid upon them.

In this retrospection of Adam's was no maudlin sentiment, or self-pity. It was his last deliberate, conscious look at that which had been precious to him, ere rising up to go his way, to act his part in the battle of life, and henceforth to live, if life were his portion, as though no Mignon had ever existed,

as though the folly of love had never found place in his thoughts.

Through the long hours of the night her spirit abode with him, and in that space he lived over again all the bitter-sweet of the past four months, all the longing, the disappointment, the fierce jealousy, the acquiescence in his fate, lastly, the renewed hope and courage with which he had returned to make one last struggle before resigning himself to an ignominious defeat.

It was strange how little of the bitterness that a man usually feels towards the woman who has disgraced him found place in Adam's thoughts. Of the ingratitude of her conduct to himself, who had so nobly and generously given her all, to be rewarded thus, he never thought; his condemnation was all for her betrayer.

Perhaps it had been his own fault that she had not loved him. Somehow, all his life long it had seemed to be his fate to miss love, and save his mother, he could not remember a soul who had ever loved him—stay, there had been one other, but it had been love guessed at, not spoken; moreover, he had not coveted it, and we all have a cruel way of reckoning as no love at all that which we do not care to take. After Mrs. Montrose had been calmly and politely snubbed out of life by her husband, her son had loved nothing and nobody until he had met Mignon; and although it had been some time before he had set his whole heart upon her, and not until he had watched her narrowly at all times and places, he had, his mind once made up, loved her with an intensity, a devotion, and an unselfishness

that she might have looked for in vain from any other man.

And so this poor fellow had given to the girl all the pent-up love for which he had never found a vent, and he had been rewarded as such men usually are. Nevertheless, love in him existing in its highest, most perfect form, sufficing to itself and absolutely independent of response, he suffered less than if that love had been the selfish passion that passes with the world for the sacred flame.

* * * * *

One by one the objects of the room came out before him, in dun, in grey, in chilly shades that made familiar things look ghostly and unreal. One by one the sounds that usher in the daylight made themselves audible to his ears, and his senses came back to every-day life. Mechanically he bent forward to gather up the relics that remained to him of the dream of his manhood. The wedding-ring, the flowers, and the half-crown were there, but what had become of the thimble? He looked at them in bewilderment for some moments, then his clenched right hand relaxed, and to his own surprise he found within it the missing bit of silver.

He carefully put away these poor relics, then he rose, unbarred the hall door, and went out into the free air.

exception. There was no news from Scotland Yard, but he had given up expecting any. He had made up his mind that if this man were to be found, then that he, and he alone, would find him, and he was eager to begin his quest.

"I am sorry," wrote his father, "that you have expressed so decidedly your refusal to see or communicate with any member of your family, and you will pardon my remarking that there is an obduracy in the way you have received this chastening blow of Providence that strikes me as being in the highest degree impious and unbecoming. Instead of viewing the late lamentable occurrence as you do, you may fairly congratulate yourself on your good fortune in being rid of the extremely forward and improper young person whom, in an impulse of mistaken kindness, you made your wife.

"You will, of course, sue for a divorce immediately, and time and change of scene will doubtless assuage the natural concern you may experience at so very abrupt and disreputable a termination of your first experience of matrimony."

Adam smiled bitterly as he laid the letter down. He knew the thoughts that had been in his father's mind when he penned that letter, as well as if they had been set in black and white before him. This luckless, guilty wife put away, what was to hinder the long-desired match between the houses of Dundas and McClosky from being brought about?

A divorce . . . Adam laughed again, and even more harshly, at the thought of it. Let this search of his, upon which he was bound, be successful, and there would either be none to sue, or none to respond. Even if this man

escaped his vengeance, were his own hands so clean, was his own conscience so pure, as to entitle him to put his wife away for what, after all, was mainly due to his own neglect of her?

He rose, went to a bookshelf hard by, took down a volume, and read the following: "The law imposes upon the husband the duty of watching over the society, conduct, and habits of his wife, and holds him answerable for every act and omission of his that may expose her purity to hazard, or render her the more easy prey to the seducer . . . A husband is bound to give his wife some superintendence when she is placed in dangerous situations."

He replaced the book, and resumed his seat before the rest of the unopened letters.

Had he not left her exposed to every risk? More than this, had he not omitted to warn her and those around her, against the possible danger she was in from Mr. La Mert? He had given her no superintendence; on the contrary, his very neglect had laid her open to the hazardous situations that had ended in her ruin. And even if he were not to blame, he still would not sue for a divorce. What! enable the foul traitor to make eternal the link that bound him to his victim, so that he would be furnished with legal authority over her, so that he would even be able to compel her to go back to him, if she escaped from his side on discovering who and what he was?

That triumph at least Mr. La Mert should not have, and, as he had said to Flora, Mignon should never be wife to two men. He turned to his letters. The next that he

opened was in a woman's handwriting, and a somewhat familiar one. For a moment, recognising, yet not knowing it, he drew back, thinking that it might be from her, with some childish, pitiful plea for forgiveness that would move him to very pity and self-scorn that he could have loved so poor a thing. The next moment he saw that it was from—Phillis.

In all his life before, though he had seen her handwriting many times, he had never received a letter from her. What could she possibly have to say to him now?

"I have dared, at the risk of displeasing you," she said, "to write you one line, to beg of you not to believe this story about your Mignon until you have heard more; there may, there must be, some explanation, for if she is all that you told me she was, though she might be heedless and wilful, that she could so deceive you I never will believe. . . . She may have thought he was taking her to you, or he may have beguiled her by some falsehood; he is a bad man, and she is so young and simple . . . only, if you believe harm of her, some day you will be bitterly sorry . . . Your friend,

"PHILLIS."

His heart failed him a little as he read the simple, romantic, girlish letter . . . after all, had he been too hasty, had he condemned his wife unjustly?

But no, reviewing all the circumstances, his momentary doubts faded . . . noble, pure-hearted Phillis, who judged all women by herself, how could it be expected that she

would understand? She would never have so acted . . . why had he not loved and wooed her, instead of the girl whose weak hands had failed beneath the weight of her husband's honour?

He separated this letter from the rest, and placed it in his breast-pocket. The others he glanced through and destroyed.

At ten o'clock he left the house, and was absent about an hour. On his return he sent for Prue. She came quickly, believing that the morning's post had at last brought news of her mistress; but her hopes fell at the sight of her master's face.

"Prue," he said, "I am leaving home to-day, and before my departure it is necessary that certain directions should be given and arrangements made."

"You're going away, sir?" she said, twisting her fingers restlessly together; "and won't you take me with you, since 'tis after her, I'm thinking, that you're going? For oh! my heart will break if I sit waiting here for her much longer."

"No," he said sternly, "I do not go in search of your mistress, but of—him."

She caught her breath, drawing back a step—something in his face made his errand clear to her, as it had done to Flora.

"God grant ye may find him," she said, some of the old dark colour flashing into her pale cheek; "God grant ye may punish him as——"

He held up his hand as though impatient of her words, then went on again.

"You will discharge the two other servants to-day," he said, "but you will remain here."

She made a gesture of surprise and despair, but he took no heed.

"For you to go in search of her," he went on, "would be worse than folly; but if you desire to do her good service, you will wait quietly for her here, where sooner or later, it may be almost immediately, it may not be for a long while, she will return."

Prue looked at him as though stunned, then a glance of intense relief spread over her features—relief mingled with surprise, and perhaps, who knows, a little womanly contempt for her master.

"She will return," he said calmly, reading the thought in her mind, "but not to me. Henceforth I shall not reside here, but this house and all within it will remain precisely as it is, and until other and permanent money arrangements are made, I shall deposit with you a sum of money for your maintenance, and for hers, should she arrive unexpectedly."

"And you say she may come soon, sir?" said Prue, her brain still in a whirl, but holding on fast to the thought that there was a definite chance of once more beholding her adored little mistress.

"She may come at any time—at any hour even. So soon as certain facts come to her knowledge, she will probably make her way hither, as being the only place in the world to which she can turn; therefore see that you are always at hand to receive her. As my movements will be uncertain for some time, I can give you no address; but I shall de-

posit in your hands a sum of money for your own use and hers, and a hundred pounds (that I have this morning drawn out of the bank in your mistress's name), which is absolutely and entirely her own, having been bequeathed to her by the late Miss Sorel. All my personal belongings—books, papers, clothes—will be fetched from here this afternoon by a person whom I shall send for them. I think that is all."

"And your letters, sir," said Prue timidly, "what shall I do with them?"

"I shall make provision," he said, "that none will be sent here. You are not likely to have anything to communicate to me save the intelligence that your mistress has returned; and in the event of her doing so, I shall probably be aware of the fact as quickly as yourself. If my father comes here asking for my address, you will say that you do not know it."

He would not be pursued everywhere, he said to himself, by letters of condolence, of pity, of advice; therefore his safest plan was to let no one, not even Prue, know his future whereabouts.

"And if she comes . . ." said Prue, trembling and turning aside, "I'm to tell her, master . . ."

"Tell her," he said, "that the shelter of this roof and home is open to her always, that she may live out a lifetime here, if she so wills. Tell her, also, that if she seek me out, or ever forces her way into my presence, that she will compel me to leave England, and thus debar me from the honourable toil that, from the day she disgraced me, is the one thing left to me in life. Tell her that henceforth we are as much strangers to each other

as though we had never met; tell her I hope she will repent of her sin; and that I forgive her, because I feel that the guilt of her wrong-doing lies as heavily upon my head as upon her own."

In the pause that followed his last words, Prue crept a step nearer.

"And not one little word, sir," she said, "(she being so young, and led away by a bad man and all), to ease her poor breaking heart?"

"Not one word," he said, "not one syllable. The words that I have spoken to you are the last that will ever pass from me to her; for should we come face to face with each other (as I pray God we never may), she will be to me as one dead—and the living exchange not words with the dead. You will tell her this."

An hour later and he had left the house.

Towards evening a man came and took away all his belongings, opposing to Prue's questions an impenetrable silence that entirely baffled her.

On the following morning the cook and housemaid departed, and Prue was left alone, to watch and wait, to start at every sound, to wander restless through the shrouded and deserted rooms, to hear strange voices wailing with every gust of wind that arose, strange footsteps coming and going on the walks without, to ask herself if the watching for this sister was to be as long and dreary as had been that of the other—nay, to feel her heart stand still as the thought struck her that perhaps, after all, it would be Muriel who would re-

turn first, and to whom the story would have to be told of why the little sister who had so long and patiently waited for her was—missing.

CHAPTER IV.

"No azure vein
Wandered on fair-spaced temples; no soft bloom
Misted the cheek; no passion to illume
The deep, recessed vision; all was blight."

MIGNON'S moonlight flitting had fallen on a Friday night; the departure of Adam had taken place on the following Tuesday.

On the very next day, Prue, sitting below in the kitchen, her work lying unheeded in her lap, heard, at about six of the clock, the sound of footsteps, light, uncertain, and slow, ascending the stone steps that led to the house.

She did not stir, but her head turned slowly, her eyes remaining fixed on the open door. Whose were those footsteps, and on what errand did they come? It was incredible that her mistress should return thus early; therefore, some instinct telling her that they were not those of a stranger, it must be—Muriel.

Muriel . . . and she would have to be told the truth Even as the one sister had been told the story of the other one's probable shame, so must the elder now be acquainted with the certain ruin that had befallen the younger.

The hall-door was open; Prue distinctly heard those wavering footsteps cross the threshold and hall, pause at the dining-room door, and pass in.

A few moments later they sounded again on the tiles of the hall, and after another short pause entered the drawing-room. Again the sound recommenced, and this time Mr. Montrose's former study was visited, and here there was a longer halt than there had been at the other rooms; then they recrossed the hall and went noiselessly up the carpeted stairs.

All this time Prue had been absolutely mastered by one of those unreasoning fits of terror that now and again hold men and women powerless when they know a murderer to be creeping upon them; and while there yet remains to them time to escape.

All the expression of her being seemed concentrated in her eyes, and these were fixed upon the open kitchen-door.

She faintly heard those uncanny steps moving about far above her, heard doors open and shut, once even fancied that a window was raised, then they came down again, ever so slowly and lightly, and sounded again in the hall.

They advanced to the top of the stairs, and the sweat broke out upon Prue's brow, as, still mastered by that perfectly unreasoning horror, a moment later she felt rather than heard some one coming down the stairs.

With that the power of movement returned to her, and throwing herself upon her knees, she flung her apron over her head in an ague-fit of fear.

The steps came nearer to her, ceased, a hand touched her on the shoulder, a voice that she had surely never heard before said—"Prue!" The woman slowly drew the apron from before her face, and saw standing before her—Mignon.

"Where is your master?" said the girl, in the voice of

one from whose life had been withdrawn every influence that goes to nourish and support it.

But Prue, dumb as the dead, made no reply; she only fell back before the new-comer, all her superstitious fears cast out by a fear infinitely greater.

This being who stood before her, who had stolen Mignon's features, but not her voice, her garments, but not her expression, this was not her mistress!

The blood curdled in Prue's veins as she looked at her. . . . What had come to the girl in the brief space of this one week?

"Where is your master?" said Mignon patiently, and still in that same lifeless, strange tone. Yet there was a ring of command in it to which Prue's natural instinct of obedience responded.

"He's gone away," she said fearfully; "but, oh! Miss Mignon, Miss Mignon . . ." all her great yearning love expressed itself in those few words, they meant a whole world of things, but the girl to whom they were addressed neither heeded nor understood, only looked at the woman as from a great way off, and said:

"And why did he do that? I suppose you mean that he has not returned from Glen-luce?"

Prue passed her hand over her forehead, and rubbed her eyes. Was she asleep or bewitched? But no, the substantial kitchen surroundings were no figments of the brain, and that was her mistress, or her mistress's wraith, standing before her, in soiled, draggled clothes, that looked as though she had not taken them off for many days and nights.

"I thought he would have come back before this," said the girl, finding that she received no answer, and fixing her blank eyes—eyes that suggested the idea that they had become thus through long gazing at some terrible sight—upon Prue.

"He'll never come back any more," said Prue, with a sob, "because . . . because . . . oh! Miss Mignon, Miss Mignon!"—and the poor creature held out her arms—"I don't love you a bit the less . . . you'll never be anything to Prue but her own darling little mistress, and she'll stay with you all your life long, for p'r'aps you'll find her better nor nobody . . ."

She had folded the girl's passive form to her faithful breast, and was weeping and sobbing over her, kissing her hair, and uttering the broken words of love that come straight from the heart.

The girl gently withdrew herself from the woman's clinging arms.

"And why will he never come back?" she said.

"Miss Mignon," said Prue, turning aside and growing desperate, "can't you guess—don't you know why master's gone away . . . and how could he ever come back when . . . when . . ."

"I must go to him," said the girl monotonously; "if he is still in the Highlands, I will go to him, for I must see him, and that at once."

"'Tis not in the Highlands you'll find him," said Prue sadly, "no, nor any other place at all that you can go to him, Miss Mignon. . . . He's just gone out in the wide

world to look for them as deserves to be killed for what they've done, and God grant, say I, that he may come up with them, and give them their deserts . . ."

A flame of fear seemed to be suddenly kindled in Mignon's eyes, her hand suddenly clutched the woman's arm as in a vice, Prue shrank from her as she cried:

"He has gone after him to . . . to kill him?"

"Ay," said Prue doggedly, "he's gone to do even that."

"To kill him . . ." said Mignon in a whisper, relaxing her grasp of Prue, and looking straight before her, as though she saw some deadly scene being enacted. "To kill him . . ."

"When did he go?" she cried.

"The day before yesterday."

"He left a message for me?"

"Ay," said Prue, hanging her head, "but don't ask me for it; I'd best not give it you to-night—not yet awhile."

"You will tell it me now," cried the girl, seizing the woman's arm again, "this instant, quick . . . quick . . ."

"He bade me tell you," said Prue slowly, "how he'd left me here to take care of the house, so as when you should be wanting a home to creep back to, as he feared you'd be wanting one afore long, you'd always have this one to come to."

"Yes, yes," cried Mignon impatiently, "go on."

"Also how he'd left in my charge a sum of money to pay our way, for the house and sich, and for your own use a hundred pounds that was all your own to do as you liked with, 'cause Miss Sorel left it to you."

"All this is no message," cried Mignon wildly, and shaking Prue's arm; "what did he say for me?"

"Don't ask me," cried Prue, trembling and turning pale, "leastways not to-night, not to-night . . "

"Do you wish to drive me mad?" said the girl, in her eyes so strange a look that Prue dared trifle with her no longer.

"He bade me say . . . that if ever you sought him out or tried to get speech with him in any way, he'd leave the country and never set foot in it again, for you was strangers to each other now till you died, and if ever you come face to face with each other, 'twould be as if you was already dead, and live folks, says he, exchanges no words with the dead. And he hoped you'd repent of your sin," added Prue, "and he blamed himself sore for all that had happened, for he reckoned his guilt was nigh about equal to yours."

"His guilt equal to mine," repeated the girl slowly, "and I should have time to repent of my sin."

"Ay, your sin," said Prue solemnly; "for your sin in loving Mr. La Mert better than master, your sin in forsaking master for him . . ." the woman paused, arrested in her speech by the expression upon Mignon's face.

"Because I loved him better than my husband," she said in a low intense whisper—"him . . . O my God!" She tossed her arms above her head, breaking out into a peal of laughter, stopped in it abruptly, gazed around as though frightened, pressed her hands hard against her head . . . then something seemed to snap in her brain, her rigid

arms relaxed and hung by her sides, a foolish smile gathered slowly about her lips, she sighed and looked downwards, plucking with restless fingers at her soiled, disordered dress.

"It is a fine spring morning, Muriel," she said, "and the wild flowers will all be creeping out . . . let us go out into the fields and have a merry day together."

CHAPTER V.

"Cease, no more.
You smell this business with a sense as cold
As is a dead man's nose."

"IT is not spring-time, Miss Mignon," said Prue, trembling violently; "it is night. See how dark it grows!—'tis only by the firelight I can see your face. . . ."

The girl looked vacantly around her, shivered, moved her head about restlessly, then took to plucking again at her poor soiled cloak.

"Yes," she said, "it is cold . . . but not so cold as out there where the leaves are falling, always—always—and at night the rain will come and soak through. . . ."

She looked down at her hands, rubbing then stiffly over each other, then, seeming to miss something from the left one, she held it up close to her eyes, knitted her brows, shook her head and sighed.

"A ring!" said Prue, supplying the thought for which the

disordered wits were groping. "You used to wear one; is that what you mean?"

"A ring!" said Mignon, catching at the woman's words. "I lost it—a long, long while ago. I put it away somewhere, but I can't remember."

She lifted her hand to her head so piteously, that Prue, to whom had come the courage with which some women are gifted in an emergency, almost lost her self-command in tears.

"We will go and look for it," she said, having the sense to humour the girl's fancy; then, taking a light with her, she led her mistress upstairs, pausing by the way to bolt and bar the door that need be set open no longer, either by day or night, for the expected guest.

When they reached Mignon's bedroom, the girl wandered aimlessly about for some time, but at last came to the dressing table, with its pink china tray in the centre. On this latter she looked down fixedly, then pointed at it, and again seemed struggling to remember something. Prue, too, drew near and looked, and the sight of the tray recalled something to her mind that she had forgotten. She had seen the wedding-ring lying there after her mistress's flight, it had disappeared on the day her master returned; evidently some memory of it was working in and troubling her mistress's mind.

"We will seek it by-and-by," said Prue soothingly, and drew the unresisting girl into a seat, then with loving hands proceeded to draw off the dusty boots, to remove cloak, hat, and gloves, to bathe her face, hands and feet (the

latter all swollen and blistered, as though they had walked many miles), and by slow degrees to completely re-clothe her in fresh garments.

The girl passively endured all Prue's ministrations, only once seeming to heed her, and that was when she sought to remove from her bosom a small packet wrapped in silk, and that from the touch seemed to Prue to contain a letter. This the girl jealously guarded, both then and after, and it was many days before Prue found out what it contained.

The poor woman's heart lightened somewhat over her loving toil, and as she gazed with passionate love into her mistress's unconscious face, she tried to persuade herself that the cloud now obscuring her brain was but temporary, and might pass from her; for the blank look on the girl's face was far less terrible than that which she had worn ere the mind fled away, and whereas the creature who had come upon Prue in her panic had seemed altogether strange to and removed from her, this one was her mistress, distraught indeed, but her very self. When Mignon was dressed, she returned to the table, and seemed to puzzle over it for a few moments, then turned to the door and Prue followed.

She went with those uncertain lagging feet downstairs, and into the study, seeming to miss the crowd of books and papers with which the room had formerly been full, sitting down at last in the arm-chair in which Adam had sat for those long three days and nights, keeping his vigil, and seeking to root her from his heart.

Prue placed the light upon the table, and going into the

hall, withdrew the key from the hall-door, ran downstairs, fastened the other entrance, and went upstairs again. She had not been a moment too soon in her precautions, for on her return she found that Mignon had removed the door-chain, and was tugging at the fastenings.

"Where are you going, Miss Mignon?" said Prue, her voice full of fear. "'Tis too late for you to be going out; to-morrow we'll go together, but not to night."

"Don't you hear somebody calling me?" said the girl, lifting her hand and standing in an attitude of listening; "up yonder in the big town, they are calling, always calling, and I must go, for I've got something to tell . . . to tell . . ."

"To-morrow we'll go," said Prue gently, "but now you're worn out and must take food and rest; and if you're ill, how will you ever be able to go at all?"

Mignon left off pulling at the chain, a ray of comprehension struggled into her blue eyes.

"If I'm ill, I shall not be able to go at all," she repeated, then went away quietly enough with Prue.

The girl required food and warmth, the woman therefore took her to the kitchen, established her in a chair beside the hearth, and closing the shutters, made of the room a picture of homely brightness and comfort.

The firelight shone, and leaped, and reflected itself in the numberless tins and pipkins ranged around, and flickered with many circles on the polished sides of the dish-covers, and deep-bodied jugs and basins. But Mignon, as she held out her slender hands to the crackling blaze, shivered still,

and her vacant, ashen face took no colour from the warmth. Prue brought food to her, but the girl only shook her head, never even glancing at it, but keeping her blank gaze fixed steadily upon the burning coals. How loud the clock ticked, how briskly and incessantly the crickets talked! Prue had taken some work in her hands, lest Mignon should think she was being watched, but by degrees the slowly-moving needle ceased altogether, and the woman sat with dry eyes and heavy heart, looking across at the little silent figure before her.

There sat her mistress, disgraced, ruined, ill in body, stricken in mind, with a future stretching out before her of bitter repentance and miserable regrets, of an alienation from all God's choicest gifts; yet as the woman looked at her, she blessed Heaven that had given her darling back to her, even though she was restored to her—thus.

What would her life have been, she asked herself wildly, without this idolised little creature to tend, to watch over, to love? She would have lost her wits in longing for her, or worn her body out in seeking her; and in her breast arose a profound and wondering gratitude.

That terrible things had befallen Mignon, things at which she could only fearfully and dimly guess, Prue was certain; but was not even this thought bearable, compared with the suspense and agony that would have been hers, had Mignon stayed away, in the power of the villain who had destroyed her?

And seeing her so quiet and gentle, some of the first horror that had fallen on Prue, when she saw Mignon, faded,

for, strange though it might appear, Mignon's face was now far less suggestive of woe and terrible things than it had been before her wits left her.

A veil was mercifully drawn between Mignon and the scenes that had produced upon her so terrible an effect, and Prue sadly wondered what might be the tale of temptation, and of speedy disillusionment that perchance would fall from the pale lips had they the power to utter reason.

It was no longer a childish face upon which Prue looked; it had aged four or five years in the past week, and the simple trusting look was, so to speak, burnt out of it, while in her eyes, before the blankness of madness fell upon them, was the look that says, "I have seen; I know" . . . the look that comes to no man or woman until he has eaten of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and that is never effaced from the features upon which it has once been imprinted.

For half-an-hour, perhaps, Mignon sat with her gaze upon the fire, then the warmth and her fatigue seemed suddenly to overcome her, her head fell back upon the cushioned chair, she was asleep. Her face grew more peaceful, yet upon it was still that indescribable air of something missing, that unerringly informs us when we stand in the presence of the human shell, not the spirit—the casket, not the jewel.

For hours Prue sat, scarcely daring to move, so fearful was she of awakening her mistress. Then, as the latter slumbered on, as one who has not slept for many nights, the woman dared at length to give vent to her grief, and

noiselessly, and with many queer twists and contortions of the face and body, wept. She knew nothing of the writings of our immortal bard of Avon, but in her homely way her heart was crying out against the pity of it—oh, the pity of it all! and she was contrasting, in all its vividness, the future that she had believed to be Mignon's, with the reality as it now confronted her. Was there indeed a curse upon this family, as Silas Sorel had said, that compelled them all to fulfil their fates? And if this was the end of the one sister, what might not be that of the other?

The one drop of honey in Prue's cup was that she had the girl under her care—that not among strangers or oppressors had madness come upon her, but in her own home, and with some one to tend her who would do so faithfully.

By degrees her tears ceased, her thoughts grew indistinct; sitting bolt upright, she began to nod, her chin by successive stages almost touching her work. She roused herself, for she must not sleep. Mignon might awake, and fancy herself beckoned out into the night by those ghostly voices, and . . . and . . . The woman's head fell back instead of forward, nodding no longer; a moment, and she was in a slumber as profound as was that of her mistress.

* * * * *

She awakened with a start, to find the broad daylight streaming in, and a chilly morning wind blowing upon her from the open window; to find the fire extinguished, the gas still burning, and Mignon—gone.

Prue started up, and sprang through the low window into the garden beyond. Surely she would find her mistress

in despair. What could she do without a soul to help her? how should she watch Mignon night and day, lest she should again make her escape? There would be no peace till she departed, though could there be a madder wild-goose chase than to follow this girl's vagrant fancies up hill and down dale? Yet to use force, restraint—Prue's heart sickened at the thought; come what might, that should never be. So long as her mistress was under her care, she should do as she listed, subject only to such controlling power as love might possess.

After five minutes' thinking, Prue came to a decision. That it was one person's work to watch Mignon was plain, and this she could not do with the house and its work upon her hands. She would go to London. In a quiet, decent part of the town she had a friend who let lodgings, and would indeed be willing to do her any good turn, or render her any assistance that she was able, and she herself would be free to devote all her time to Mignon. If she grew very restless, and still insisted on wandering, then Prue must e'en go with her and guard her as best she might. To stay here was plainly out of the question, and she set to work at packing her mistress's clothes with a rapidity that seemed to calm Mignon's restlessness. She even in a fitful, uncertain way rendered some assistance, and seemed satisfied and pleased when all was finished. It was a less easy matter to keep her quiet, when Prue had to go from one room to another, locking up and setting in order, arranging everything for the long absence that she felt to be inevitable. She had thought of an arrangement by which the house would not be with-

out a guardian, and though it gave her a sharp twinge to leave the property unprotected which had been given into her charge, she said to herself that her duty was to her mistress first, and that duty she would perform to the best of her power.

She managed to pack her own modest trunk, and to write two letters, one of which, unseen by Mignon, she addressed to her master, and placed on the table in his study; the other she stamped and put into her pocket.

She then prepared food for her mistress and herself, but could not prevail on Mignon to take more than a few mouthfuls. All being ready, and Mignon growing restless, Prue put on the girl's hat and cloak, dressed herself, and went down to the gate. After ten minutes' waiting, Providence sent that way a youth of tender years, who undertook, on the promise of sixpence (not to be made over till his return), to go to the Lilytown livery stables and despatch to Rosemary a horse and fly.

The biped, quadruped and conveyance, with a driver to boot, arrived in due season: the luggage was fetched out, and the kitchen-door locked. Mignon, all impatience, had already taken her seat, and in a few moments Rosemary was left behind, and for the third time within four months the girl had set out again on her travels, while Prue, looking back, asked herself with dim eyes and a foreboding heart, was it even possible or likely, that this last journey should have a happier ending than had the two preceding ones?"

CHAPTER VI.

"O perilous mouths
That bear in them one and the self-same tongue,
Either of condemnation or approof,
Bidding the law make courtsey to the will."

Two months had gone by since mistress and maid had left their safe home-shelter, to wander out into the world in search of adventure. A poor distraught pilgrim, a stupid faithful follower, what chance had these of success in their quest, and would they not infallibly come to grief and confusion, as do most earnest, simple folk nowadays, who ride a tilt at a world that has no sympathy with romance, or pity for misfortune?

As yet, however, the adventures of the pair had been neither dangerous nor exciting; they had simply been profoundly, prosaically miserable.

The world seemed to be standing still, Prue sometimes said to herself, with a dismal shake of the head; she only wished she could, but she had by this time almost come to believe that her feet were doomed to go dancing on for ever, like the girl who was vain of her red shoes in Hans Andersen's story.

Two months of wandering in the streets of London that Prue had come to know by heart, and at which her soul sickened as she asked herself, was this woeful search, after she knew not what, to go on for ever, or would the end come but with the cessation of her little mistress's already slender hold upon life?

For no farther than the great city had those indefinite travels to which Prue had resigned herself the day she left Rosemary been extended. Whoever or whatever might be the object of Mignon's search was contained in the town, and when once the girl had left Waterloo, and found herself among the roar of traffic and sea of passing faces, she had grown calmer, and, looking eagerly about, had seemed to recognise things, although when later they came to a quiet part of the town, she turned restless again and appeared distressed. And from that day, from the moment when with infinite difficulty Prue had prevailed upon her to enter the modest rooms tenanted by Prue's old friend, there had been no keeping the girl within doors; let them watch her as they chose, seek to amuse her as they listed, she would glide out of their midst like a shadow, and be in the streets again, turning her head from side to side, looking, looking for something that she could not find. It was all in vain that Prue followed and brought her home; Mignon displayed such skill in eluding her again, that Prue gave up all attempt at coercing her, and did the sole thing possible to her, let the girl go where she would, and herself—followed.

All Mignon's heart was bound up in this mysterious quest; she seldom noticed Prue, rarely spoke to her, and seemed to have lost all her former affection for the woman. And with that marvellous instinct which in mad people almost takes the place of sense, Mignon, no matter how far she went, or by what devious streets and ways, invariably found her way home again, without any reference to the patient shadow who followed at her heels.

Prue sometimes rubbed her eyes and pinched herself to make sure that it was not all a dream, that this girl, clad like herself in the coarse dress of the poorest classes, had once been tenderly nurtured, fondly cherished; moreover, the centre to at least four people of such love as is rarely indeed called forth or given. Truly love had been to her no blessing, but a curse, else had she not come to such a pass. Was it possible that she had ever been winsome and laughter-loving and lovely, this girl with the worn and wintry face, that was like a beaten-down snowdrop, and from which her blue eyes, no longer beautiful, looked out upon the passing world with blank and wandering gaze?

As she went to and fro in her shabby clothes, the beauty that had once been hers was so hidden and dimmed as to be well-nigh lost, and men's eyes, resting carelessly on her face, seldom or never gave it a second glance, unless for the sake of the misery written upon it. And of insult or molestation from the lower classes, into whose haunts she often strayed, she was entirely free. Her apparent poverty made her one of themselves, and she was henceforth a child of the people, and heeded by them no whit. In those days it seemed a good thing to Prue that Mignon's sweet looks had so utterly departed from her, for how else could she have failed to be exposed to a thousand perils against which Prue's weak arm would have been powerless to shield her?

When first the pair had come to London, Prue had dressed her mistress as became her station; but on discovering how much attention the girl had attracted in her wanderings, the woman, with some of that good sense that is usually

called "common," for the reason, apparently, that it is the most uncommon of all qualities, saw the necessity for change. Hence those common garments that the girl wore abroad, and beneath which she was as delicately and fastidiously cared for as heart could wish.

For whom was Mignon looking? That was the question that Prue asked herself with weary iteration as she walked in her mistress's track day after day. She scarcely thought it was for Muriel, since now and again, and in her sleep, there had fallen from Mignon's lips words that seemed to reveal a strange fear and dread of her sister, while of the love that had formerly been the religion of her life there seemed to remain not a trace. And if Mignon were not looking for Muriel, all thought of the latter being for the time driven out by a later and more engrossing idea, then could it be for her betrayer, Philip La Mert, or for her husband Adam?

Every one seemed to be looking for somebody else, nothing sorted itself or came straight, and life just then was to Prue a mental rag-bag, in which she plunged her hand only to bring out a bundle of odds and ends.

Where was her master, and had he yet come up with the man upon whom he had vowed vengeance? And where was Mr. La Mert now, and how came it that he had made not an effort to overtake and recapture the girl whom he had taken such desperate pains to win?

From Rosemary had come not one word of news. The woman in whose care Prue had placed the house, and who reached it the day after Prue's departure, reported the arrival of sundry letters for Mr. Montrose, all of which awaited

him, together with Prue's, announcing Mignon's return but from Mr. Montrose himself had come no sign or word although two months had passed since he set out.

And in all this time Mignon had ceased not from her mysterious search, save when, worn out with bodily fatigue she would sleep profoundly, or sit, folding and unfolding her restless hands, staring out of the narrow window at the stunted evergreens in their pots. I wonder what goes on within the clouded brain of such an one, whether all is darkness and quietude, save when some glimmer of reason pierces through to it; or whether all is wild hurry and chaos idea succeeding idea, in lavish profusion, yet all alike unsatisfactory and impossible to grasp?

Only once had the girl shown herself moved by aught that she had seen or heard abroad, and that was the sound of church bells. She would start up, trembling all over, when she heard them; and on Sundays it was impossible, no matter what the weather might be, to keep her within doors, for to church after church she would find her way, only to look eagerly at it and turn away again, as though disappointed. Evidently the sound of bells suggested some memory to her, that she was incessantly trying to puzzle out, but could not. Prue sometimes wept when the girl turned her wistful eyes upon her, with the look in them of a dumb creature who seeks to express himself, yet cannot; and would have given ten years of her life to be able to supply the answer after which the toiling brain sought. One day the girl came and laid her slender hand upon the woman's.

"Do you hear a bell," she said, "that tolls, tolls always, by day and night? It is loud and deep, as though it came out of the clouds, and if I could hear it, I should be able to find . . . to find . . ."

She paused, lost the thread of what she had been saying, fell to plucking at her gown in the old restless fashion.

Was there some method in the girl's madness after all? Had she gone no further than London in her flight with Mr. La Mert, and had something actually happened to her there to account for this persistent search?

These were the questions that Prue was now asking herself; she thought she would make an experiment.

"Come with me, Miss Mignon," she said, rising; "and we will see if we cannot find this great bell together;" and there and then she took her mistress within both sight and hearing of Big Ben.

They had never gone within reach of it before; the girl's wanderings, though so long continued, had covered no great area, and as the first note rolled out on the air, she started and listened intently; then her face clouded with disappointment.

She shook her head, and pulled at Prue's hand to come away. The woman was not yet disheartened, only half of her experiment was over, and a little later she stood with Mignon beneath the shadow of St. Paul's, awaiting the stroke of the half-hour. It came; and as the solemn boom pealed out, Mignon's face changed.

"I shall find it now . . . I shall find it now . . ." she

cried, running from Prue's side, and looking eagerly at the great shops all about, as though she expected to find what she sought among them, growing puzzled and sorrowful at last, as understanding that her search was not over yet. It was with difficulty that Prue could persuade her to go home at all that day; and on the morrow she was back again almost as soon as it was light, wandering through bye-streets and alleys, that she had never trodden safely but for her poor dress and lack of comeliness and grace.

She seemed to grow brighter and happier after that day; and Prue, in the midst of her weary discomfort and fatigue, took heart, and began to hope for better times.

Some curious instinct apparently guided the girl in her wanderings, for she never went beyond a certain radius; and Prue observed that as soon as the tone of the great bell came to her muffled, she invariably turned back, so that it would appear the object of her search lay somewhere within its full sound.

It was after a week of this perplexing, round-about search, which, like the crab's progress, seemed to be two steps forward and one back, that Mignon one day turned into a decent, seemingly ancient street, at one end of which was a small church, that lay back at some distance, having a graveyard before it.

Like an arrow shot from a bow, Mignon sped forward, and in another moment had reached the rusty iron gates, that stood partially open. Plainly she recognised, remembered the place; but "what," asked Prue, as she curiously followed her, "could she want there?"

She leaned her head against the gates, and looked in. She took the place for a disused burying-ground, until she saw in the distance two or three recently-made graves. Apparently a small strip of new ground had been added that made the churchyard, disused for many years, again available.

It was not to these newly-opened mounds that Mignon made her way, but to one whose unsightly outline the grass had covered, and falling on her knees beside it, she pressed her brow and her lips against it, murmuring indistinct words; while Prue, standing afar off, with the long, dank grass under her feet, the murk December sky above her, beginning to understand, asked herself: "Was this the grave of Muriel, or of Mr. La Mert?"

* * * * *

There fell upon Mignon after the discovery of that nameless grave, a peace and quiet that were almost happiness.

No longer she led poor Prue's aching feet on an endless chase, no longer the two passed their lives in the streets, jostled by the busy crowds; the girl would every day pay a visit of longer or shorter duration to the grave-yard, then come away home with Prue, and sit for hours together perfectly still. Sometimes a look of horror struggled across the blankness of her face, once or twice she swerved away from the grave as though some ugly thought or idea stung her; but for the most part she seemed to have a weight removed from her, and to have attained to what she desired. It was now close upon Christmas, and the streets were full of that sweetest and best-beloved of flowers, the violet,

offered to the busy passers-by, by the hands of countless poor women, to whom its perfume and beauty meant no more and no less than—bread. Of these gentle wayfarers, messages of love from Nature in her haunts to the men who toiled in the great city, Mignon bought great bunches daily, or rather, she made Prue do so, passing by all but the freshest, and then going away with her hands filled, to lay them upon that mysterious grave.

Prue, from a distance, used to look and look, and wonder with all her might whom this violet-decked mound contained. It was a long grave, quite long enough to hold a man, and Muriel had been tall for a woman, while Mr. La Mert had not been tall for a man, so that it was impossible for her unpractised eye to decide which of them might be sleeping there.

It was not very long, however, before her doubts were set at rest in this wise:

One day, Mignon, during her accustomed visit, appeared for the first time to take heed of the surrounding tombstones, and the sight of them seemed to suggest something new to her mind. Then began one of those efforts at remembering that were so piteous and painful to witness; the fugitive idea that disappeared just as she was about to grasp it, the precious half-thought that she was not able to complete, these irritated and distressed her almost to frenzy. She began her wanderings again, but the area of them was so circumscribed, and that which she sought so near at hand, that on the third day she found it.

Prue marvelled what was going to happen next, as her

mistress stopped at a curious little yard lying back from the houses in the narrow street where it was situated, and as she drew nearer, perceived that it was that of a stone-cutter and tombstone-maker.

Blocks and fragments of stone, statues, tablets roughly hewn and not yet inscribed, others half completed, and some discoloured and defaced, filled the enclosure, while below a plaster bust of the first Napoleon leant a small wooden board on which was inscribed

"MANGLING DONE HERE."

A tipsy wretched-looking man, who supported himself with one hand against the low palings, and swayed to and fro, was extending his right hand towards the grimy stones and statues, and shaking his head sadly, as though philosophising on the mutability of all things, and applying the lesson to himself. Mignon slipped past the poor maudlin wretch, to whom, nevertheless, there came in his cups gleams of understanding, to which he was a stranger when sober, and passing with swift feet in among the dismal collection, she looked about her until she espied a pure snow-white marble tablet, that showed out like a lily from its dusty and mutilated surroundings. She flew to it, paused breathless before it, and clasped her hands with joy. Again the poor witless creature had been guided to the object of her search, again instinct had asserted itself successfully.

Prue, her heart beating, certain that at length she was on

the brink of a discovery, drawing near, looked over the girl's shoulder, and read the following inscription:

"MURIEL: AGED 20."

CHAPTER VII.

"O Heavens! die two months ago and not forgotten yet? Then there's hope a great man's memory may outlive his life half a year."

THE stone-cutter at this moment appeared upon the scene, and, concluding the oration in course of delivery outside the railings by summarily bidding the man to move on, he turned to give his attention to the two shabby women who stood looking at the marble tablet. Mignon's face was hidden by the ugly, down-bent hat she wore, but to Prue he looked for speech.

"Anything I can do for you to-day in the tombstone line, ma'am?" he said, deciding in his own mind that here was a customer whose order (if any) would be of the most modest and humble description.

Prue answered his question with another

"Who ordered that tombstone?" she said, pointing at the one which bore Muriel's name.

The man's face, an ordinarily good-humoured one, took a gloomy expression as his eyes followed Prue's finger.

"Oh! *that?*" he said; "that's a sore question, mistress, for I'm out o' pocket by that stone to the tune of more pounds than you'd ever guess on. 'Twas ordered come nigh

on three months agone, and, as my wife says, more fool I to go to hexecute a horder like that without ever a taking of the lady's name as hordered it."

"A lady ordered it?" said Prue, beginning to see daylight; "can you mind just what she was like?"

"Ay," said the man; "for spite of all the trouble she war in, she was jest the purtiest critter I ever clapped these eyes upon, she war. She come in all of a tremble, and as white as that there stone, and, sed she, 'Will you make me the whitest, beautifullest tombstone to be got in all the world, for the sweetest soul to lie under as ever lived? for,' sed she, 'I can't a-bear to think she's a-lying all out there in the cold without nothing over her to show as there are them above-ground as rek'lects her.' I asked her what the 'scription should be, and she said 'Mural, aged 20;' just that, and no more, and when I said a comfortin' verse out o' Scripture 'ud look well, something about a broken lily or the shorn lamb, or sich, she said 'No; nothing but them three words, Mural, aged 20.' Had to look it out in a dickshunary, cos I thought she meant a mural tablet, but found 'twas a woman's name, and an outlandish one too, I'm thinkin'."

"And did she say she'd come back?" said Prue

"She seemed all lost and dazed like," said the man, who leaned across a broken column, with a wisp of straw between his lips, seemingly taking a satisfaction in repeating the story, "as if she'd got a bad blow and didn't rightly know which way to turn, nor what to be about. Sed she, 'I've got no money, not even none to take me home,' and she looked

down at her little feet as though they was a-going to carry her there; 'but I'll come back,' sez she, 'to-morrow or next day with the money,' and then I thought she said suffink about her 'usband. But, lor; that must ha' been just a slip, for only to think of that young lass with a 'usband; why, 'twas downright larfable. There might be one a-growing up for her somewheres, and maybe more nor one sweetheart to fight over her, but *that* bit of a thing married? No, no! 'Tain't possible, sez I! Howsumdever, I made it, and there 'tis, and there 'tis like to stop till Doomsday, for I ha'n't seen or heerd a word more of her, nor don't reckon as I ever shall."

Mignon at that moment turned her face away from the tombstone and towards the man; he saw her and started.

"If it worn't that yon young woman's so pale and sick-lookin', and dressed so different to t'oth—the lady who came, for she war dressed very handsome, though dusty, I'd say that them two was the very moral of each other," he said, in a startled tone.

A thorough waiting-woman's pang for her mistress's poor shabby clothes touched Prue, as she said shortly:

"Yon is my young lady, Mrs. Montrose, the same as come to you three months ago; she'd have come before, but she've had other things to think of. And what may be the price of the stone as she ordered?"

Astonishment, relief, anxiety, succeeded each other on the man's countenance, the last expression finally predominating. This young lady had grown poor, as her

clothes sufficiently attested, and she was not likely to be able or willing to pay the large price that he had set upon the stone, for in obeying her orders no expense had been spared. He opened his lips at last, and named a sum that to Prue's modest notions seemed fabulous, and yet that was a fairly honest charge, as charges go.

"That's a deal of money," she said, pursing up her lips, "and I don't know nothing 'bout such things. I'll ask somebody who does, and see what they say."

But Prue had reckoned without her host. Mignon at that moment approached, and drew her towards the stone.

"Help me to carry it," she said; "don't you see that it is for her? She has waited for it such a long, long while, and now we will take it to her."

She put her frail arms round the heavy slab, sighed, and looked piteously for help at Prue, the man, who had followed, staring at her in wonder.

"Her mind is gone," said Prue, gently; "I reckon 'twas *that*," she pointed towards the tombstone, "that did it. Yon was her sister."

The man, stroking his chin thoughtfully, looked pityingly at the girl, but his mind was evidently much exercised with his own affairs. Should he get rid of this white elephant, or should he not? And if this young lady were not right in her head, could she be made to pay the debts that she had incurred?

He was not long kept in suspense. A few moments' reflection had convinced Prue that there would be no moving her mistress from that spot unless the grave-stone

went with her, therefore the sooner she returned home and got the money, the better.

"My mistress 'll not stir from here—you'd best watch her," she said to the man, with a heavy sigh, "I'm going to get the money, and 'll be back in an hour or so."

She departed, leaving the stone-cutter still leaning against the broken column, twirling the bit of straw between his lips, and regarding the little figure that sat on a block of stone hard by, as though it were by far the most interesting study in his collection.

When Prue returned, she found both in precisely the same attitude. Business, mangling included, was apparently slack that morning, and no other customers had appeared. Vanishing into the limbo beyond, the man presently returned, bearing a small ink-bottle, a pen, and paper. Squaring his elbows, and sticking his tongue into alternate cheeks, while his head rested on his right shoulder, he made out the bill (using a discoloured slab for a table), receipted, and handed it back to Prue.

"You'll have it put up now—directly?" said Prue, before parting with the money, knowing that Mignon would stay there all night were her humour not fallen in with.

The man looked doubtful; he didn't know if he'd got anybody near by to help him—he would see—and again departing, he presently re-appeared with a youth who answered to the name of "Sam."

The money paid over, they took up the tombstone between them and went their way, Mignon and Prue following.

It was a sad little procession enough, but it had not far to go, and before the short December day had quite closed in, the stone gleamed in all its flawless purity at the head of the hitherto nameless grave, over which Prue had so long and vainly pondered.

But as the woman marked the large expanse of white that was as yet bare of inscription, she said to herself, with a terrible tightening at the heart, that there was ample room for yet another, and that when the daisies should be springing over Muriel's grave, they would be springing over Mignon also, and that though in life the sisters had been parted by cruel fate, in death they would not be divided.

CHAPTER VIII.

"The gods die first;
And they whose heart is dry as summer dust,
Burn to the socket."

NIGHT in the streets of London, and the great hush and peace of a universal rest spread like a mantle over the silent, sleeping city. Night . . . that comes to all, to the oppressed, the poor, the weary, as to the light-hearted who take no thought for the morrow, and sleep, that is the one good gift of God of which no tyrant or taskmaster, however cruel, has power to deprive us. For a few hours, at least, the bitter tongue that has all day scourged and stung, will move no longer; the harsh hand that has driven and chastised

will lie nerveless as an infant's, and the busy plotting brain lose its cunning in idle, harmless dreams; yea, until the morrow, prince and peasant, tormentor and victim, murderer and saint, will alike be enfolded in the innocence of God-given sleep, and for these few hours at least are equal in the one blessing that is common to all.

What a clean, white, beautiful city had not the moon-beams made of London on the night of which I write! How deceitfully, in their white splendour, had they glorified all that was picturesque, ennobled all that was mean and sordid, until the rudest objects were sightly and pleasant to behold!

Prue, awakened by that pure and brilliant shining, or by some unusual sound, turned cold with dread as she perceived that the door of the inner room, in which Mignon slept, and across which her own bed was drawn, stood a little way open. Starting up, she at once discovered that room to be empty. The girl must have stepped over the sleeping woman, and so made her escape. Hastily dressing herself, Prue, wasting no time in searching the house, and finding, as she expected, the front door unfastened, sped on, like one possessed, through the streets, clear as daylight, to the place, nigh upon two miles away, to which she felt certain the girl had gone.

Her mistress alone in the streets of London at this hour! Moreover, her wits gone from her, into what peril might she not run, or what might not befall her, all defenceless and astray as she was? And so, as Prue hurried on, she took no heed of the beauty of the

night, save inasmuch as it afforded more light, and therefore more safety, as she hoped, to her darling. Except the policemen on their beats she met scarcely a soul, for there is no place quieter than the heart of the city after midnight, and Prue's heart gave a jump as, passing under the shadow of St. Paul's, the great clock above rang out the hour of two.

In a few minutes she had gained the churchyard, and making her way to the stone, that shone pure as snow in the moonlight, drew a deep breath of relief as she saw Mignon stretched beside it, her cold cheek resting against the yet colder marble, while her arms were thrown around it, as though in protection.

The night was intensely cold, every star burned clear and intense as a jewel in the sky overhead.

The girl might well die of this exposure, thought Prue fearfully, as she made her way through the long grass. What could have possessed her to come out at such a time, unless, indeed, she had been beckoned forth by that mysterious power said to be exercised by the moon over all mad people, and that compels them to gaze upon her, even against their will?

As Prue drew nearer, she made two discoveries: her mistress was fast asleep, and she was not alone.

A man's figure, divided from Mignon by Muriel's narrow grave, knelt, his left hand pressed palm downwards against the grass, his right half hidden in his breast, as though he sought something, or was trying to keep back some gnawing pain or hunger.

"Was he seeking a weapon with which to strike the sleeping defenceless girl yonder?" Prue asked herself, as she swiftly approached. "Had this man met her in the brightly-illumined streets, and, taking advantage of her loneliness, followed her even here?"

She was but a few yards away when the man, abandoning his intent watch of Mignon, suddenly flung his arms high above his head, his face being for a moment lifted to the sky, then, swaying forward, fell across the grave, his head almost at the girl's feet.

Prue paused abruptly, all fear of violence or insult gone from her heart, but in their place an intense loathing and hatred that made her tremble like a leaf as she stood; for she had recognised in the man before her he who had blighted her mistress's life, making of her an outcast and a wanderer on the face of the earth; and all the misery of the past, all the dreary desolation of the future, the work of this man's hands, rose up before her, moving her to a strength of anger that Adam himself could scarcely have surpassed.

It seemed unnatural to her that Mignon could sleep on in the neighbourhood of this traitor, that the mere fact of his breathing the same air had not power to awaken her as with a sense of suffocation, and the woman was passing on to her mistress's side, when something arrested her steps, and she stood irresolute, looking down on the motionless figure of the man and girl before her.

A few moments and the bowed head was lifted, once more the grave divided the man and girl, and the woman

standing a few yards behind him, saw him stretch out his hand and cautiously, curiously touch a fold of Mignon's coarse stuff gown.

The touch of that coarse clothing seemed to burn his hand . . . She was clad thus, she . . . she was alone at this hour of the night, alone she must have traversed the streets of London; and what was that look upon that white and wasted face?

To the girl who filled the mound between them he had brought . . . death, and now, secure from further storm and shipwreck she slept, let us hope, soundly and well, but to this other who survived he had brought—what?

Like twin-flowers, the sisters' faces rose up before him, as he had once beheld them, and now a mound of earth represented the one: yon poor outcast the other, and for the life that had gone out in darkness, for the one that yet more miserably dragged on, should not a heavy reckoning be required before the tribunal of God, if not of man?

He must awaken her, he said aloud, with a shiver that was partly physical cold; she would die else of the exposure; but Prue noiselessly passed him, and kneeling down by her mistress's side, put both arms around her:

"Waken," she said, "waken, waken—come away home, come away . . ."

Slowly, drowsily, for exhaustion and the intense cold had almost thrown her into a lethargy, Mignon opened her blue eyes full upon Philip. He still knelt on the other side of the grave. Upon his face, upturned to hers, the moonlight shone clear as day.

Her eyes became fixed; a look of knowledge, of recognition, flashed into them. Dashing aside Prue's arm, she sprang to her feet, her nostrils dilated, her breath coming quick and short, then her hand went faltering downwards, as though seeking a knife; she drew back a step, and——

"*You!*" she cried in a low, harsh whisper, and the unutterable loathing, hatred, and passion expressed in that one whispered word absolutely appalled Prue with their intensity. Then the fire so fiercely kindled went out like a suddenly extinguished torch, and the cloud that for one moment's space had been dispersed by some lightning intuition or memory, closed round her again; she stood irresolute, as one from whose hand the weapon has been struck.

Philip, who had covered his face with his hands, cowering under the anticipated shock of her next words, curiously surprised at the stillness that followed on that one burning syllable, lifted his head, looked, and saw in her face his dread confirmed. It was but a mindless body that stood on the opposite side of the grave. The essence that had made her what she was—in short, Mignon—had fled, leaving but the husk that had contained it. As he realised the truth, as he beheld in the eyes of the girl he had so loved the doom brought down by his sin upon her, that the bitter cup that had been filling, filling always since that May-day when he had first beheld her, received its last drop, and that thenceforth, no matter what further blows Fate might be pleased to inflict upon him, he was

absolutely proof against them. He had reached the limit of human suffering, when, with a ghastly cry, he fell along the grave, and in his agony bit the grass and earth between his teeth, praying that God would strike him dead as he lay, nor ever again compel his eyes to rest on that living mockery of the thing that had once represented to him all the beauty, the sweetness, and the joy of earth.

"Tell him he must go away," said Mignon, pulling at Prue's hand, a look of horror and aversion upon her face, "he must not come here. No one must come but me."

"You hear what my mistress says, sir," said Prue, overcoming by a violent effort the distaste she felt to addressing Philip, "you're to go away; and sure," she added bitterly, "'tis the least you can do to respect her wishes."

He rose, not looking at Mignon, but downwards at the grave that by the sovereignty of crime was surely his, and with one yearning, hopeless look at Mignon, he turned, and, as though the grace of obedience alone were left to him, went slowly away, and passed out through the open gates.

As he disappeared, Mignon pressed both hands hard against her brows, and for the second time that night there came into her eyes a flickering ray of reason.

"I remember now," she said slowly and painfully, "he is a murderer, and," she took one hand from her brow, and pointed her forefinger downward at the grave at their feet, "he killed—*her*."

CHAPTER IX.

"One woe doth tread upon another's heel,
So fast they follow."

MURDERER or no murderer, Philip La Mert was fast approaching a higher tribunal than that of man, and if Adam would wreak his vengeance upon him, then must he come quickly, or his enemy would have escaped him.

When Prue, on the day following that meeting at the grave, had again found herself face to face with him, and from his lips heard the whole truth, her woman's heart had gone out in pity to the man whom she so well remembered in the heyday of his boldness and beauty, and whose physical sufferings at least might compel ruth from those who would have denied all pity to his mental ones.

With a great dread had Prue been aware, on the preceding night, of Philip's steps tracking her own and Mignon's homewards. It had been with a positive determination to go away on the morrow that she had at last lain down to rest, for how could she doubt but that once again he would seek to establish his power over her mistress, and how was the girl to resist him in her forlorn, defenceless state?

But when that morrow came, and with it the enemy against whom all her energies were for the time bent, she had found herself compelled to hearken to him; and, at his miserable tale, amazement, joy, grief, relief, had succeeded each other so rapidly in her breast as to leave her breathless at the last.

Her first impulse, when all was told, had been to rush straight to her adored little mistress, to kiss her hands, her feet, the very hem of her garment, and implore forgiveness for the readiness with which she had accepted the fact of Mignon's guilt; her second, to burst into passionate weeping as the thought struck her that the truth came too late to save her mistress from the hearing of those cruel words that had overturned her reason, too late to save her from the terrible curse that had fallen upon her.

"If master only knew—if he only knew!"

These were the first words that uttered themselves out of all the confusion of thought that distracted her.

And then it had been Philip's turn to listen to a story, to have, if possible, the darkness of the shades about him deepened, to find how Mignon had been beggared of all, even to her reason, through him, to discover that in bitterest irony of fate, she had been believed to have lost herself for love of one whom she loathed above all things created under heaven.

If aught could animate with strength that feeble frame, struggling against the mortal weakness that beset it, it would be the longing that now possessed him to come face to face with Adam, to do the one act of reparation that lay in his power ere death placed it beyond his reach for ever; so that now, if Adam were desirous of meeting Philip, the latter was even more imperatively desirous of meeting him, and henceforth in the streets of London a double search was being prosecuted, while poor Mignon's life was wearing away under the fever of a longing that she

could not utter, and one only of the four people whose lives had been so closely intertwined soundly slept, her troubles over, in her lonely grave in the churchyard in the City.

* * * * *

When Philip had returned home on the morning following the day when he believed himself to have made the discovery of Mignon's love for him, his higher nature had at length conquered his lower in the protracted struggle of the night. He had renounced this sweet, strange, precious gift that had fallen to him, he had sworn, with his whole strength of body and soul, that, of his own will, he would never look upon Mignon's face again, that he would not have the sin upon his soul of encouraging this love that was pure, because unconscious, by either look or word—nay, that it should be left to wither, and gradually die for lack of sustenance, to be replaced by-and-by with that love for her husband that bears the same relation as fruit to blossom, and that is so infinitely better worth the taking, but so immeasurably less lovely and pleasant to the eye!

Thus he had cast out the devils in his heart, and taken one more step upon that path of atonement, of which the first had been planted when on that day in Paris he had resolved to disobey the beckoning finger of passion and to follow that of duty.

After he reached home, a heavy, dreamless slumber that had lasted all day fell upon him, and from that sleep he had been awakened by a summons so urgent that his servant had at last, through the messenger's importunity, been compelled to convey it to him, and

Philip had become aware that his vows of never seeing Mignon again were vain as wind, for that into her presence he was, by the compelling force of his vow to her, now bound to go, with the death-warrant of Muriel upon his lips. Even as the messenger spoke, he saw the look that he had last seen in Mignon's eyes, the look that would grow in them when she knew the truth, though not for one moment did the dastard idea cross his mind of breaking the promise that he had given in Mr. Montrose's house but a few days past. Without the loss of a moment he must take her to her sister's death-bed; there must be no delay, for if the sisters met not now, they never could meet upon earth. Yet, as he dismissed the messenger and gave the requisite orders for his departure for Rosemary, he found himself wondering in what form of words he should utter the summons; nay, as his horses bore him swiftly through the night, and each moment brought him nearer to Mignon, his mind seemed absolutely to lose its capacity for thought, and memory alone placed certain words in his power, so that he began mechanically to mutter over and over again: "Come, Mignon, come!"

These words were graven on his heart; they now, by no effort of will, rose to his lips, and he found himself repeating them as though they were a charm, and he helpless without their aid. When he reached Rosemary, as one who walks in a dream, he had, without consciously thinking, gone straight to the garden, feeling no surprise at finding Mignon there, and as a child repeating a lesson, he had said, "Come, Mignon, come!"

Of a possible misconstruction of Mignon's departu with him, that which then stood to him for his mind w as blank of any thought as of the vision of the deat bed to which he was going; he just then felt, saw, a comprehended solely with the senses, and was conscious nothing in heaven or earth but that he now owned M non's love, and that in a couple of hours he would be v in her eyes. Even when she was seated beside him in t carriage, her hand upon his arm, her eager questions in l ears, he was not able to drag his mind from those tw fatal facts; a reply of some sort he must have given h and one that conveyed the knowledge of her sister's dang to her mind; for she had covered her face and shru back into a corner, asking no more. Nevertheless, was, neither then nor afterwards, aware of the exact wor that he used.

When they were in the train the attitude of the two r mained the same. The girl asked no further questior seemingly fearful of the replies that she might receive, b with convulsively clasped hands, and fixed eyes looking o into the blackness of the night, endured that intolerab fever which surely we have all known when on some desp rate errand, the issue of which is life or death.

Mignon clasped her hands together, and looked at Phili who sat, his hat pulled low over his brows, his arms folded c his breast, motionless as a figure carved out of stone, and th words that trembled on her lips died unspoken.

Had he not told her too much already? She would st cheat herself with a doubt, a hope; she would still hug th

"if" to her breast, which interposed itself as a shield between her and the certitude of accomplished fate, and then her eyes returned to the black window-pane.

To Philip the moments tarried not, but sped swift as lightning. He would have held time back had he possessed the power, and he shrank, as may the craven malefactor at his approaching doom, from the moment when the sisters should be face to face with each other, and when into Mignon's eyes should come the awful look that would surely strike him dead as he stood.

Presently he found himself wondering that Mignon did not speak, that she did not torture him with her questions, her guesses, and then it came into his mind that perhaps, since she had heard his story (had she not once told him so with her own lips?), she was now connecting it with that of Muriel, and even blindly groping her way to a dim suspicion of the truth.

He abruptly left his seat, and crossed over to the one opposite hers.

She looked up into his face, not speaking, her whole bearing one agonised question, but he did not reply to it: only with a great yearning he gazed at her, asking himself, for one brief moment, might she not, for love's sake, forgive him this sin that he had committed?

Then, rising as abruptly as he had approached her, Philip set the full space of the carriage between himself and her, and until the train finally stopped, neither moved nor spoke.

In a few moments they were on their way to Muriel.

On, on through the crowded streets they sped, and Philip

observed what Mignon did not, how that each moment they were leaving the wide, well-lit thoroughfares behind, and plunging into those purlieus of poverty, vice, and ruffianism into which a prudent man would think twice before venturing in broad daylight.

Mignon, whose suspense had now reached the point of positive agony, looked at, without heeding, the sordid streets the barrows with their guttering candles, the slatternly, half-dressed women, chaffering with the hucksters over their wares, all the unsavoury, unlovely sights and sounds of a London back street.

The driver stopped at the door of a mean, miserable-looking tenement, of which the door stood open, while a sickly glimmer of light shone here and there in the dingy windows.

"It is a mistake," cried Mignon, trembling, and leaning out. "She cannot be here . . ."

Philip, who had alighted on the other side, now opened the door, and without a word, held out his hand to assist her to alight.

His silence, the ominous look in his set face, sent a strange chill through her, and as mechanically she descended, hope died in her breast, and Muriel, a moment ago so near, seemed to recede from, and stand at a great distance from her. Trembling, she looked upwards at the narrow, many-windowed house, then started, as from a lower room there pealed out a hoarse shout of tipsy laughter, while on the pavement hard by, a hurdy-gurdy man set his barrel to the tune of "Home, sweet home."

As she crossed the dismal threshold, a dirty woman came

out of a room at hand, and stared at her with a mingled familiarity and surprise, that puzzled, yet did not affright the girl, who, swiftly advancing, said:

"My sister?—she is here; she is ill, will you take me to her at once?"

The woman looked over the girl's head at Philip, who now entered, and repeated incredulously—"Your sister?" then with an appraising glance at the girl's dress, and another at that of her companion, shook her head, and set her arms akimbo.

"You've made a mistake, miss," she said, coarsely, yet not ill-naturedly; "'tis not the likes o' you as has sisters stoppin' in this house, leastways——"

"I told you it was a mistake," said Mignon, turning to Philip feverishly: "O! do not lose a moment, or we may get to her too late——"

But Philip had drawn from his breast-pocket the written address that had been furnished him, and the name under which Muriel was then passing.

He handed it in silence to the woman, upon whose face, as she read, there dawned a stupid wonder; then she looked from the paper to Mignon, from Mignon to the paper back again.

"She is here," cried Mignon, seizing the woman's arm in her excitement, and shaking it, "O! tell me, she is not . . . she is not . . . dead?"

For reply the woman lifted her grimy forefinger, and pointed upwards.

"Her as you're asking for, she's there," she said; "there's no missing the way—she lies in the attic."

"Stop here, sir," she cried, in quite a different tone, as the girl, swift as lightning, sped up the narrow stairs, and disappeared from her sight.

If the house had seemed full of waking, noisy people to Mignon a moment ago, it was none the less full of sleepers, she thought, as she passed upwards through the heavy breathings of seemingly countless human beings—women who lay, as sometimes she perceived through the open doors, herded together like wild beasts, in all the grotesque ugliness of profound slumber, a squalid gruesome sight that turned her sick, as, still mounting higher and higher, she pushed on to that attic where she had been told she should find her darling.

Surely, surely the air would be purer up there, and these noisome fumes would be left behind, or Muriel, who loved all sweet smells and pleasant sights, must find it hard to breathe, and so thinking, and clinging resolutely to the belief that her sister was still alive, and able to discern between good and evil, she found herself standing before a shut door, and knew that she had reached her long journey's end, and that on the other side of it was . . . what?

For a moment she hesitated, covering her face with her hands, then, softly turning the handle, she found herself in a narrow bare room, lit by a skylight, through which there showed the sapphire sky, while by the light of a dimly burning lamp she discerned the outline of a rude pallet, upon which was stretched the body of a lifeless woman with a dead infant on her breast.

CHAPTER X.

"Night will strew
On the damp grass myriads of lingering leaves,
And with them shall I die; nor much it grieves,
To die, when summer dies on the cold sward."

WITH a terrible cry Mignon fell on her knees beside the pallet, and flung her arms about the inanimate forms of mother and child.

A shiver ran through her at the contact of the babe's chill body, but in Muriel the spark of life still flickered, for as Mignon called upon her in a thousand wild and tender words of love and pity, two dark eyes opened slowly in the corpse-like face, and stared fixedly at her, with an awful mingling of horror, fear, and a something of churlish unwelcome.

Feebly seeking to free herself from that close, importunate embrace, Muriel's head recoiled sideways on the pillow, and thus lying with half-averted face, she flung one wasted arm across her eyes, while with the other she clutched at, and drew upwards, the ragged sheet, as though to hide from her sister's eyes that which lay upon her breast. That averted face, that significant gesture . . . they told Mignon all, and hope and she had done with each other for ever when she stooped and laid her lips against that thin and toil-worn hand.

Hope was dead, but love remained: love that could be turned aside by no shame or sin in the creature beloved, and that dumbly expressed itself in the passionate strength

with which the girl's arms closed once more about that unresponsive, silent form.

"Muriel! my love, my darling!" cried Mignon in a voice of anguish, "look at me . . . speak to me . . . It is your little sister . . . your Gabrielle . . ."

Slowly, sullenly, Muriel drew from her eyes the arm that shielded them, and, still with that hard look of unwelcome in her eyes, said:

"You can kiss me . . . You can put your arms about me . . . Do you know what I am? A lost woman, an outcast . . . a mother who is no wife . . ."

Appalled by her sister's words, her tone, Mignon drew back, trembling. Was this the sweet-voiced sister of her love, whose nature had been all gentle, and good, and tender?

"You should not have come," went on Muriel in that unfamiliar voice; "your coming gives me no joy, and adds but one more pang to my death-bed. It was my one prayer, my one desire, to die as I have lived—alone."

Her great hollow eyes strayed upwards to the blue patch of sky above her head, where shone those dazzling points of brightness, of which a little child once said that "they were gimlet-holes made by God to let the glory through."

"Since I could not come back to you as I had promised—honest—I swore that I would never come back to you at all. From my place out in the cold and the darkness I have watched you in the sunlight, happy and innocent; and my one joy has been that you did not know, that you never would know, the truth."

"And you call that love?" said Mignon, with a very

bitter cry. "Ah! had you longed for me as I for you, you would have heeded nothing; you would have come to me straight . . . for how could the sin of a bad man turn my love from you, or make you any other to me than what you have ever been?"

"Think you I had no pride," cried Muriel, "that I would have mingled my ruined life with that happy, pure one upon the threshold of which you were standing? My sin and shame were my own, their shadow should never rest upon you, and since it is in the nature of all things to forget, I knew that time would heal the wound my loss inflicted upon you. But now . . . now I die, enduring the misery of beholding you. You are acquainted with the story of my degradation, and—for I know your heart—long after I am gone you will remember and suffer . . . suffer . . ."

With the last words her voice had changed, had faltered, and now slow, painful tears rolled down her cheeks and fell on the hand that still held the sheet below her chin.

She lifted this hand and held it before her eyes.

"Tears!" she said. "How long is it since my woes have been so light as to enable me to weep? When one's heart is breaking, one does not weep, one prays; when it has broken, and God has hid His face from us, one neither weeps nor prays. To the woman who lives, to struggle daily and hourly in the teeth of every obstacle to support the life that she desires only to see annihilated, with a memory that not for one moment permits forgetfulness, but rather stings her through and through,

think you so human, so easy, a relief as tears is permitted?"

"It is all over now!" said Mignon wildly. "You will grow strong and well; you will come away with me, and once together we will forget the past . . ."

"Well . . . happy!" repeated Muriel; the words leaving her lips with a strange intonation, as though unfamiliar alike to her ears and lips.

No need for Mignon to paint alluring pictures of the future, all the loud-voiced renunciation in the world could not preach so stern, so brief, so pitiful a homily as did the tone in which Muriel had uttered those two words. For her were no possibilities on this side the grave; and this was borne in upon Mignon's mind as she looked upon her sister's face.

"And he . . ." she exclaimed involuntarily. "Is there a God in heaven, that he goes his way unpunished while you are—thus?"

"He lives," cried Muriel, every trace of softness vanishing from her voice and manner, "absolutely indifferent to my fate, with heart, brain, soul, possessed by love of a woman, who, living or dying, has my deepest curse, my undying hatred, a woman but for whom, and her theft of that which was mine, I should be happy with you now, and to whom I owe all, all that in these past miserable months has befallen me. For every misery I have endured, every degradation through which I have passed, for every cruel pang of hunger and sting of cold that has assailed me, I thank her, and pray that even such may she endure a hundred-fold, and may *her last end* be even as mine!"

She paused, livid as the little shrouded face that lay on her breast, and exhausted by the fearful energy with which she had spoken.

"She may not have known," said Mignon, in a very low voice, "but he . . . O! my God! he . . . I have heard of such men, I have been told that such as he existed, but I did not believe it until now. . . ."

"It was not his fault," cried Muriel swiftly; and somehow, she could not have told why, Mignon knew then that, whatever this man may have been, her sister had once, nay, still loved him. "It was hers: she must have known his story—all the world knew it—and she should have scorned to steal him from a poor creature who had lost all for his sake . . . Any other lover would have done as well for her; there was only one man on earth who could enable me to retrieve my past . . ."

"Do not blame her," said Mignon, her young stern face lifted, as though in invocation of God's vengeance, to heaven; "blame him . . . Tell me his name, that I may seek him out; that I may bring him face to face with the ruin he has worked, that living and dying its memory may be a curse to prevent and follow him, that he may never know happiness with any woman living, but be shunned and abhorred by all who value honour and truth! . . ."

But Muriel made no reply; a deathly pallor had spread over her wasted face; and as Mignon, believing her to be dying, chafed her cold hands, the door opened, and a middle-aged man entered the garret, who looked scrutinisingly at the sick girl. He shook his head as he sat down beside her,

then took that slender wrist in his hand, and shook his head for the second time.

"She will die?" exclaimed Mignon passionately. He had not thought so young a voice could express such depths of misery; he looked from the one sister's face to the other with a profound pity, perceiving that some tragedy was being played out here; then he rose and beckoned her to follow him.

Without the door, Mignon's question took another form of vehement appeal.

"She will live?" she cried.

"She may live till morning," he said reluctantly; "beyond that, I can encourage you to hope nothing."

Cowering beneath the surgeon's words, Mignon leant against the wall, her hands raised and pressing her ears, as though to shut out by sheer force the intelligence just conveyed to her.

The great bell of St. Paul's hard by rang out its solemn note; it had at intervals sounded in her ears for the past hour, but now it seemed to fall on her heart with dull and dreadful meaning, to toll for the spirit so soon to set forth on its last awful journey alone!

She could not have told how or when the surgeon departed, only her senses seemed to come back to her when, once more kneeling down by Muriel's side, she laid her arms about her neck. The real parting between the sisters was then, not later, and as their eyes met, all the stubborn pride and the fierceness died out of Muriel's, and the two poor creatures clung together in an embrace in

which the bitterness of death strove to cast out all the sweetness of love, yet could not.

Side by side their heads lay on the pillow, as they had so often lain in the days when, as little children, they had dwelt in love together, and, though in thought each was living over again the cruel years that they had been divided, no word was spoken between them, for heart spoke unto heart, and the mute language of eye and touch told their own tale only too eloquently.

Yet was not their suffering equal, for on the heart of the one already lay the numbing shadow of death, while that of the other, being vigorous with the pulses of life, was strong to endure; and this Muriel perhaps understood, as she laid her thin hand on her young sister's shining hair, and smoothed it from her brow.

"My little one . . . my heart . . ." she said tenderly, "and must we part so soon?"

"Take me with you," cried Mignon, passionately. "O! my love, my love, take me with you!"

"No," said Muriel; "you cannot come with me, my sister, and you would not, even if you could, for you have other ties, other hopes than those that have been blighted in me, and the love of a sister is not so deep and close as is the love of a husband."

Mignon covered her face with her hands, confounded, ashamed, stricken dumb with a sense of disloyalty that showed in the light of a crime, for, even as Muriel spoke, the moment of revelation had come, the moment that told her how, not in the sister here dying before her, was her life

centred, but in one whom, until now, she could not be said to have consciously loved.

She slipped to the ground and knelt there, her face hidden, but on her head Muriel's hand still moved gently to and fro. Did the poor hardened heart find an added bitterness in the knowledge, that of no love on earth, not even that of her sister in its entirety, did she die the possessor?

"I have seen him," said Muriel, after a short pause, "I have even heard his voice, and, myself hidden, watched his features, weighed his words, and I thank God that you are in hands so strong to protect and guard you as are his. And he being what he is, you do well to love him with your whole heart and soul, though were he false or bad, I would say, charm his fancy, delight his senses, but never give him that hold over you that your love, once irrevocably given, will afford to him!"

The bitterness had returned to her voice, the hardness to her eyes and lips; it was as one who thinks aloud that Mignon, lifting her head, exclaimed: "You loved—him?"

"Can you understand a love," said the dying woman, turning the restless fire of her dark eyes upon the white misery of her sister's face, "that tortures, embitters, shames the giver, that is so dark and harsh and strange a potion to the receiver, that he turns from it with hatred and loathing? It was thus that I loved him when the first headlong passionate impulse of pity and tenderness that I had felt for him vanished, when I found that whereas he had been the one man the earth held for me, I had been but one out of many women to him, and that, not out of love, but for the

purpose of freeing himself from the wife he so hated, had he taken me away with him, and that though he meant to abide by the vow he had sworn to me, it would be from a sense of honour, not love, that he would fulfil it!"

Mignon listened like one who in a dream hearkens to the sound of words that she has with her actual ears heard but a short time before.

Surely she had heard this story somewhere, or one strangely like it . . . she tried to remember where and when, but something seemed to hold her back, and prevent her.

"He came into my life like a storm-wind, in a moment he seemed to turn the dull sands of my life to gold, he swept me off my feet on the tide of his bold impetuous wooing, and for the sovereign charm that was in him, and for the great pity I bore him, and for that I was so young and inexperienced in the ways of men, I was undone, and never pausing to think, forgetful of my God, myself, all, my love for you being faint and chill (since there is not room for two human idols in one heart), when he beckoned to me, I went, and in the self-same hour repented.

"A woman who gives all, leaves herself for ever a beggar, and henceforth, love as she will, her hand is empty of good to the man for whom she has stepped off her pedestal of purity.

"And so it came to pass that when the first girlish passion that so sweetly fed his vanity had passed, to be replaced by that bitter, tormenting love of which I have spoken, he ceased to care for me, and even believed me to have wearied

of him, as rapidly as he had done of me. I did not undeceive him, I scorned to pray for that which I could not win, and so we went from bad to worse, till our existence side by side daily became more and more unendurable, and neither dared to look ahead at the future we seemed doomed to drag out together. One joy in the future, at least, I possessed; he could look forward to none. Mine was that when the period of waiting was past, and his vow to me redeemed, I should be free to go to you, my sister—rehabilitated. I was dwelling near you, I was eagerly anticipating the day, not far distant, when I should be able to visit you not by stealth, but openly, when I made two discoveries.

"The first" . . . she shuddered, her eyes travelling downwards to that shrouded outline on her breast. "The second . . . that the man for whom I had yielded up all, the man who had sworn to make me his wife when he should be free, not only loved another woman, but had resolved to break that vow, since thus, and thus alone, could he be happy with—her.

"Not all at once did this latter knowledge dawn upon me. The first warning came when I heard him murmuring over and over again in his sleep some woman's name, and the fashion of his uttering it convinced me that this was no passing caprice, but that he loved her. It was his custom to keep a diary, safely secured under lock and key, and to this, during his absence in town on the eve of his divorce suit, I found access, and beginning with a certain entry in May, I read straight through to the last line, written no longer ago than the night before.

"I saw myself condemned to everlasting shame. I saw the stranger snatching from me my last hope of redemption, and I called down God's curse upon this woman who cast me out to perdition, who sundered me for ever from the sister who, but an hour ago, had seemed to be within my reach.

"Never pausing to think, only wishing to escape the degradation of the offer of money that he would inevitably make, I left his house, and came to London, alone, penniless. I obtained employment, I lost it; at every turn I found false friends and abundant enemies; my hand was against every man and woman, as their hands were against me, and by successive stages of poverty and misery I have come to—this.

"Yesternight I laid down the work upon which depended the morsel of bread that would keep body and soul together, for some instinct told me that my time of peril was nigh at hand, and I would see you if possible once more; so on foot I made my way to you, and, as though in answer to my prayer, you came to your bed-room window, and looked out.

"I returned here at daybreak, and then . . . and then . . ." she shuddered, and looked downward, "this poor, blighted child of sin, prematurely born, saw the light . . . It just breathed and died, and I bade them lay it in my arms and leave us in peace, and that thus we might be buried together."

"And you were near me last night," cried Mignon. "You saw—you heard me . . . you could turn away from the home that so long has waited for you, to endure your agony alone . . ."

"To die would have been no such great thing," said Muriel, faintly, her brow damp and chill with the dews of exhaustion; "more bitter to me than any approaching pang of death was the thought of your presence at my side, my sister . . . but now, thank God for this little space that we have had together, and, in the days to come, perhaps you will be able to forget all the sin and the shame, and think of Muriel as she . . . used to be . . . ."

Her head fell back, the beautiful wan face took a greyer pallor, the dark eyes closed, she had slipped away into unconsciousness.

In vain Mignon cried, with every fond, foolish word of love her heart could fashion, upon her sister to speak, to awaken. Muriel lay quite still and silent: on brow and lip the foreshadowing of that peace which comes to all in the hour of death. Presently the garret-door was pushed gently open, and the woman of the house entered. She came to the side of the bed, and stood, an uncouth and slovenly figure, looking down, with a shake of the head, and a sigh, at the dying girl.

"She'll not last till morning," she said, "and mayhap she'll be pleased to go, for 'tis a hard and wearifu' life she's lived, and an honest, all but for the sin o' one bad man; and I guess that won't be reckoned agin her up yon, where she's goin' safe enough."

A tear rolled down her dirty, raddled cheek, then another and another; she wiped them away as though ashamed at displaying so much emotion, and added:

"Him as you come with, he's down below, and just wild

to know how she is—and will she live or die?—and I'm to take him word, though I told him what the doctor said, and how there worn't nothing as even the Queen herself could do, if she wished it ever so, for the poor creature."

"Him?" repeated Mignon, staring at the woman with miserable eyes. "I don't know who you mean; but yes, yes . . . I remember. . . . Tell him . . . tell him . . ." (a sob rose in her throat and seemed to strangle her) "that she is dying. And go away," she added feverishly; "let me have her all to myself for the little time that is left to us . . ."

A hoarse shout of tipsy laughter from some place below ascended the stairs, and came in at the open door. At sound of it, the woman, with one backward glance at Muriel, went quickly away.

The dying girl opened her eyes as the door closed.

"The man below—is your husband," she said, a burning blush covering her face, for a moment cheating Mignon's eye with the bright hues of returning health.

"My husband! No," said Mignon, colouring in her turn. "He does not know . . . he is away in Scotland. . . . He who brought me (God bless him for it!) is one who has been a friend to both you and me, Muriel; indeed, but for him, my darling, I should not be with you now . . ."

"And how came this stranger to know . . . that I was your sister?" said Muriel slowly. "How came he to know where to find me, hidden as I have been here?"

"I cannot tell," said Mignon sadly; "only I made him promise me once that if ever he should meet you he would

Full as the miserable place had been of human beings when she ascended, it was more densely packed than ever now, but the noise of revelry below had ceased, and all seemed wrapped in slumber.

As that light footfall came down the stairs, a man who had sat for the past two hours at a dirty, beer-stained table in a miserable room off the passage, looked up.

He knew that light step all too well, and that it was coming to him. . . . Pale as death, he rose up to meet her, and with downcast eyes stood awaiting the words of his condemnation. She had entered the room, she had approached, she actually stood before him, and still she did not speak; then, suspense being unendurable, he dared to look at her.

She held a flaring candle in her hand that shed its full light on her miserable young face, and on the fair hair that, tied at the back with a ribbon, fell loosely on her shoulders.

Nevertheless, not of her pale beauty, no, nor of her anguish, was Philip thinking, but that in her blue eyes shone as sweet and friendly a look as they had ever worn for him, nay, that, as though in her trouble she turned to him as her friend, she put out her hand to his, and, with a pitiful little attempt at a smile, said:

"I have given you a great deal of trouble, have I not? But O! I am grateful . . . but for you I should never have seen my darling again. . . . She is asking for you," she said simply, yet with a great effort; "she sent me for you. I was to give you this message from her: 'Muriel would like to bid her friend, and her sister's friend, good-bye.' Come!"

"She bade you tell me this," he repeated, catching his breath sharply, as may a man who, having just escaped shipwreck, sees his bark about to founder within reach of land; "she has spoken of me to you, then?"

"I told her of how good you had been, how kind," said the girl. "But you must come at once, for she is dying fast, and the morning will soon be here . . ."

Her voice ceased in a sob as she uttered the last words, and then he followed that lightly-flitting, girlish shape up, up those many stairs until they came to the garret-door, outside which Mignon paused with the handle in her hand, as one whose heart fails at that which lies before it.

The great bell of St. Paul's clanged out the hour of four, and with the final stroke Philip La Mert had dumbly spoken his last farewell to the Mignon he had loved so well, and for whom he had so deeply sinned and suffered.

CHAPTER XI.

"A thousand knees,
Ten thousand years together, naked, fasting,
Upon a barren mountain and still winter,
In storm perpetual, could not make the gods
To look that way thou wert."

PHILIP, advancing, stopped abruptly as one struck to the heart, and gazed straight before him. To all appearance already dead, Muriel lay on the miserable pallet; her child, no longer hidden, resting on her breast.

Upon that tiny wan face, with its anxious and premature

look of care and suffering, his gaze remained riveted; then, as though it were a sight to be hidden from Mignon's eyes, he mechanically strove to interpose his body between her and it.

It has been finely said that "God punishes not by His caprices, but by His laws," and some glimmer of this great truth was perchance borne in on Philip's mind as he stood, forgetful even of Mignon, face to face with Muriel and her babe.

Slowly his eyes at last left the child, and travelled round the squalid miserable room, that told its story of destitution all too plainly; then his glance reverted to the straw pallet, with its scanty clothing and patchwork quilt.

Mignon now drew near, and, kneeling down by her sister, laid her lips against the unconscious girl's cheek.

"Waken, my darling," she said; "he whom you bade me bring . . . he is here. . . ."

Slowly, uncertainly, a hue of life crept back to Muriel's cheek and lips, her eyelids flickered, parted, and he knew that his hour had come.

He stood, his arms folded on his breast, and waited.

How long endured the pause that followed? To Philip the suffering of an eternity was crowded into those moments of waiting, and when at last her words came, they were received by him as the sentence of execution may be by the condemned man who has grown weary of waiting for death.

At sight of him a look of yearning love had for a moment swept across the dying woman's face, and could he have found

but one word of truth or gentleness then for the poor creature who had so sinned and suffered for him, she might have died at peace with him . . . but alas! faithful to Mignon at Muriel's expense to the last, he saw neither look nor gesture. Conscious chiefly of his guilt in the recoil it was about to have on the younger sister, he saw and suffered with her eyes and heart alone, while the tragedy of the other passed him by.

As he stood silent, impassive, instinct told Muriel that the influence of the stranger woman was still upon him, and roused to a jealous madness by the consciousness of her impotence to move him in death, even as in life, she cried bitterly:

"Hold up your head, coward, perjurer, betrayer that you are, and look upon your handiwork, ay, print us well—my child and I—upon your memory, and then go back to her, and be happy with her if you can; forget us, if you are able!"

He raised his head, looking not at her, but at Mignon, upon whose face had come a great fear, wonder, and expectation.

Muriel caught at the girl's arm and drew her forward.

"It was but now," she cried, "that you prayed me to tell you the name of my betrayer, that you might seek him out and drag him here, compelling him to look upon the ruin he had worked. . . . You need not go far to find him, for there he stands before you. . . . Your friend. O my God! . . . your friend, Gabrielle, and mine!"

"He?" said Mignon, gazing at Philip with dilated eyes. "No, no . . . it is not possible! . . ."

But as she looked, something in his face arrested her attention—their eyes met. For one frightful moment she thought she was going mad; the next she was standing beside him, her white lips shaping, yet refusing to utter the words,

"It is true?"

"It is true."

She swayed slightly away from him, as if about to fall, then, as her lips moved, he fell down on his knees before her, and burying his face in her dress, in a voice of agony, cried:

"Spare me, Mignon, spare me!"

A low cry followed his words, but it was uttered by the elder sister, not the younger, as, lifting herself on her elbow, and desperately fighting against the mortal weakness that beset her.

"Who utters the name of Mignon here?" she cried fearfully, "that is her name . . . the name of the woman who stole my Philip from me . . . who cast me out to die a hundred deaths . . . whom I have cursed, whom I have hated . . . there is no Mignon here!"

But even as she spoke, slowly, slowly there dawned in her eyes an awful fear; then, revelation coming to her even as it had come to her sister during the few past moments:

"You . . . you are Mignon?" she said in a whisper.

"Yes . . . I am Mignon . . ." said the girl, in a voice that was like nothing human; "and you have cursed me . . . O my God! . . . you have cursed me . . . unsay that

curse!" she cried, as she flung her arms about her sister's orm, but Muriel, thrusting away with all her feeble strength those beseeching hands, fell back upon the pillow—dead!

CHAPTER XII.

"God made him, therefore let him pass for a man; in truth, I know it is a sin to be a mocker."

SILENCE in the death-chamber for the space of five seconds; then, with an awful cry, Mignon flung herself upon her sister's body, crying to it, for dear God's sake to give her one word, only one, of pardon, of blessing . . . of love. . . .

But that agonised prayer fell upon deaf ears, and to all the girl's beseechings, that which had been Muriel opposed the grim silence that is the only true and veritable silence upon earth.

It is a silence that can be felt . . . it is a hideous void at which the ear aches, the heart rebels, against whose inexorable majesty we dash ourselves, impotent as breakers against a wall, and woe, woe unto those who have not obtained forgiveness ere the everlasting silence has descended, who have not wrested one parting word of love from the dying lips, and to whom must remain lifelong despair!

For how long endured that wild and frenzied prayer from the living sister to the dead? Daylight was struggling uncertainly into the room when Mignon ceased her cries, and slipping to the floor, lay all huddled up together, like a creature who has been crushed out of all human shape.

Muriel had cursed her . . . and Muriel was . . . dead.

God Himself could not reverse those two awful facts, and beneath them she sank down stunned, a creature one half of whose brain was paralysed, and in whom memory and consciousness, save as affecting these points, were for the time being absent.

The sister of her love . . . the sister for whom she had so patiently watched and waited, flesh of her flesh, blood of her blood, heart of her heart . . . had cursed her, had died with that curse unrevoked upon her lips, and across the bridge of silence, now yawning 'twixt them, no shriving word could ever cross, but for to-day, to-morrow, for ever, the woman who lived would have to rest under the shadow of that dreadful ban.

Muriel was dead! . . . O! never more would her coming be hearkened for by day or night, never more would her beautiful face come to Mignon in her dreams, with the glad light of love and welcome upon it; in wrath and bitterness had it passed away for ever . . . Yet no instinct of rebellion stirred in her gentle heart as she looked up at the patch of grey sky overhead, and dumbly—endured.

Where was Muriel now? Had there fallen from her the earthly vesture of human passion, wrapped in which she had hurried into the presence of her Maker?

Surely in that new existence, all human hates and jealousies would be blotted out, love for the weary wayfarers left behind alone remaining?

In vain had Mignon addressed her prayers to the helpless clay beside her; but perhaps the disembodied spirit was somewhere at hand, and would hear, would forgive . . .

"Muriel!" she said, in a low hoarse whisper, "are you anywhere near? . . . Will you not forgive . . . forgive? . . . If you cannot speak to me, send me some sign that I may know and understand . . ."

But there came no answer back to her, nor any sign that she craved; only some one who had heard that anguished pleading, yet of whose presence until now she had not been even conscious, drew near to her, and uttered her name:

"Mignon!"

By any other name should he have called upon her rather than this . . . it struck upon her ear with fatal significance, and revived that portion of the night's revelations which had hitherto been merged in the stupendous calamity that had so instantly followed upon it.

Full recollection of the last time he had called her by that name, and the results, came to her as she slowly recoiled from him, in her eyes a great horror and loathing that grew and grew, and beneath which he shrank.

"And you dare to remain in her presence," she said, in a low intense whisper. "You dare to approach, to speak to me . . . you . . . If I had a knife in my hand I would stab you to the heart, and think I did righteously in ridding the earth of you . . . murderer, hypocrite, dastard! Is there a God above," she cried, lifting her face to heaven, "that He permits such as you to live—such as she to die? And I have called you friend . . . I have taken your hand in mine . . ." she paused to look down shuddering, as though a stain must rest upon it; "I have talked to you of

her, of the happy days that she and I would have together, and all the time . . . all the time, you knew yourself to be her betrayer . . . that out in the world she was battling with hunger, cold, and shame. . . ."

She writhed to and fro, as though racked by physical pain. It was as though she were tasting every misery through which her sister had passed. And he from whom the dead woman yonder had not wrung one glance of pity, in Mignon's every pang endured a hundred deaths.

"You have spoken to me of love . . ." went on the girl. "O God! . . . that my ears have been polluted by words of love from such as you . . . O, monstrous . . . my sister's lover . . . the father of my sister's child . . . and I . . . I might have become your wife, and so supplanted her, taking the place that by every right of honour and justice was hers; but that I had one friend who took me to the shelter of his home . . ."

With the last words her voice changed; into her face, all distorted by its great loathing and hatred, a more human expression came. For the first time Philip dared to look at her.

But as he gazed, that momentary gleam of softness died out, her voice was harsher, even than before, as she cried:

"And so it was of her you were speaking when in the garden at Rosemary you bade me remember in the days to come how you loved me, in spite of your conscience, your *God*, all . . . It was with that black treachery to her at

your heart that you came to me with the foulest love-suit a man ever prosecuted; it was with the knowledge that your success with me meant worse than death to that poor trusting creature, that you prayed me to become your wife . . ."

The deadly detestation with which she breathed those two words seemed to rouse Philip.

"And did I not love you?" he cried wildly; "has not the greater part of my sin been committed solely and entirely for the sake of the great love I bore to you?"

"Can such as you love?" she said, her gaze full of scorn. "O! do not so take that sacred name in vain, or I would pray that it should never find place in my heart . . . that I might live and die knowing naught but the hatred and loathing of which it is now so full!"

"Hatred?" he repeated, trembling as the sinner may who has long expected his doom, yet cannot but wince as he hears it pronounced; "yet though love can turn to hate so swiftly, may not the memory of love tarry with us for awhile? By the love you so lately bore me, I beseech you to have mercy, and not utterly crush to earth him who is already so heavily punished of God!"

"By the love I bore you?" repeated Mignon. "I . . . love you? . . . In the days that I liked you best, even when I was so drawn towards you by the belief that you could give me news of my darling . . . there was never one thought of love for you in my heart . . ."

"When I walked with you," said Philip, gazing at her as a man who slowly awakens from a dream, "when, as plainly

as looks could speak, you told me why you had removed your wedding-ring . . . how your heart had awakened at last, and for me . . ."

"For you?" she said, below her breath. "O! not for you . . . not for you . . ."

Her rigid face changed, her bent brows relaxed, in her eyes a tender light shone, an exquisite blush mantled slowly on her cheek, and spread gradually over her face.

"You love Adam!" cried Philip involuntarily.

"That is between him . . . and me . . ." she said below her breath, then, turning back to her sister, she flung herself on her knees by the pallet, crying:

"Oh! my heart . . . my heart . . . and can I talk of love, or life, or hope, while you lie thus?"

"You have never loved me," said Philip slowly; "never . . never . . . and you love . . . him."

He approached the bed, and looked down, not on Mignon, but on Muriel, upon whose beautiful face the bitterness of life had passed away, to be replaced by the peace that passeth all understanding.

Slowly, fearfully, he lifted her wan hand, the hand upon which a ring should have been. but was not, slowly he laid it down again. This poor creature had loved him once, had sinned, had suffered for him, and he had loved her not, while that other whom he had loved to his own undoing had cast his passion aside as a thing of naught, had mocked, derided, denied it.

"She would have forgiven me," he said very low; "broken, wretched, dying as she was, she would have found some

word of pardon, of love, for me, had I prayed for it. But you . . . you, who stand on the threshold of a happy existence, upon whose conscience no sin or shame rests, who have the haven of a husband's love to which to creep . . . and the long years of the future in which to forget—you withhold from me, miserable wretch, the one word for which I crave . . . 'He that cannot forgive breaks the bridge over which he must pass himself, for every man hath need of forgiveness . . .' Have you never heard or read some such words as these?"

For a moment those merciful words knocked at and sought an entrance at the girl's heart; for one moment she wavered, then, as her eyes fell on the dead, so wronged, so mute, so pitiful, her face hardened, and unconsciously echoing the old Queen's words:

"God may forgive you," she said, "but I never can!"

Then he turned and went away, leaving her alone with Muriel.

CHAPTER XIII.

> "He marked their brows and foreheads; saw their hair
> Put sleekly on one side with nicest care;
> And each one's gentle wrists, with reverence,
> Put crosswise to its heart."

THE last offices of the dead had been performed, and, folded in spotless white, lay the young mother and child.

No flower was in either hand, though an hour ago the

woman of the house had entered the attic, bearing a great basket of snowy blossoms and waxen green leaves; but Mignon, knowing by whose hand they were sent, shuddering, had bade her take them away . . . no flower purchased by his gold should lie upon her darling's breast.

The woman had gone away, asking herself, did the girl think that dead folks buried themselves, and whom did she suppose was making arrangements for, and paying the expenses of, her sister's funeral? And surely, if a substantial favour like that could be accepted at his hands, folks might bear to stomach a simple gift of flowers?

She had made a pretty shrewd guess at the story of the dead woman, and the relation borne to her by Philip; but Mignon's ways puzzled and confounded her.

Not one thought did the girl seem to give to those stern, inevitable details of death that usually fall so heavily on the mourner. Dimly she knew that soon her sister would be taken from her, therefore she clung to and wou'd not leave her during those long three days and nights that elapsed between the death and burial.

With Muriel's curse ever ringing in her ears, with the awful knowledge of her sister's past lying like a stone at her heart, she kept her lonely vigil, dumb, half-crazed.

Had she not possessed a source of hope ever present to her mind, had she not had a vision of her dear home, and of a refuge to which she would fly when this agony should be overpast, she would certainly have lost her wits then, not later; for assuredly it was a woman more than half mad who, on the morning of the funeral, flung herself across the

coffin, and refused to allow the men to carry that light burden away.

Then, all cries, prayers, tears, being unavailing, she had looked her last on that poor dead face, and, following the coffin down those many, many stairs, later on was standing by the side of an open grave, hearkening to a voice that, from a great distance off, uttered the words, "Ashes to ashes . . . dust to dust" . . . and then there had fallen a crash of earth on Muriel's heart . . . and with a great cry she had fallen down . . . anon awakening, to find herself in the miserable garret, stretched on the pallet that but a few hours ago had been pressed by Muriel's dead body.

She sat up, put her feet to the ground, thrust the hair from her eyes, and looked around—she was alone.

As half-conscious she still gazed around her, the door was thrown back, and Philip entered.

"Mignon!" he cried wildly, "Mignon! have you no mercy, no pity for a wretch so forsaken of God and man as I? I cannot die without your forgiveness . . . and death is fast overtaking me. . . . Before it is too late, I beseech you to speak one word, one little word of pardon . . ."

"Had you any pity upon her?" cried the girl, trembling in every limb. "Can your repentance bring her back again, or my forgiveness make you other than the murderer that you are? Go to Him"—she pointed upwards—"but do not come to me. . . . Perhaps before I die I may forgive; but not now . . . not now . . ."

The poor wretch had clutched at her dress; she drew it

out of his grasp as though his touch were contamination, and as she did so, he fell forward and lay across the foot of the pallet.

For a moment, a faint pity struggled into Mignon's face, then, with a gesture of disgust, she turned from him, and pressing her lips on the pillow Muriel's head had pressed, she threw a last look round the wretched room, and passed down the staircase out into the busy streets.

* * * * *

Through the brain-fever, long threatened, that at last had overtaken Philip, he was tended not unkindly by the woman of the house. In his pocket-book she found money enough and to spare for all expenses, and being fairly honest, according to her lights, she procured him such advice and nursing as he needed, and left the matter in the hands of Providence. Providence turned the scale in the favour of life, yet with so niggard a hand that scarcely could the man, who at the end of two months rose from his bed, be said to be saved, but rather that his span of life had been for a very short period extended.

His first act had been to visit Muriel's grave, and he had seen the violets strown upon it, marvelling whether her sister's hand had laid them there; nay, on that self-same night some strange influence had seemed to beckon him thither, as it had beckoned Mignon . . . Mignon, whom he believed to be safe in her husband's care, and of whom he had been thinking as one who, in the sweets of her new-found love, was already learning to forget the miserable story of the past.

So he had thought, so he had dreamt of her . . . and the poor distraught outcast sleeping in the moonlight was the reality of his dream.

Would death come to him before he had restored her to her husband, before the story that she was powerless to tell had been related by the only other person living able to speak it? This was the question that each morning he asked himself when he rose; that was as far as ever from being answered when night came, and he laid himself down to seek the rest that was always denied to him.

CHAPTER XIV.

"A great and important passion is a great means of wisdom."

A BLUSTERING January wind that carried a foretaste of spring in its vigorous breath, tore and frolicked and swept on its way, sending hats flying, clothes whirling, apple-stalls to the right about, and with its rude salute even brought a tinge of colour to the cheek of a poorly-clad girl who stood at the corner of Chancery Lane, with several bunches of violets in her hand.

At a little distance stood a middle-aged woman, who watched her, and seemed to be waiting until her mind should be made up.

While the girl hesitated, as one perplexed, and undecided in which direction to proceed, a man of unusual stature emerged from beneath Temple Bar, and came slowly towards her.

She saw him and shrank back, then, as he was passing her, she darted forward, and stood in his path. The woman too uttered a low quick cry. His thoughts were miles away, his eyes took no heed of the faces about him, nevertheless, attracted by their perfume, he glanced downwards at the cluster of violets held, as he thought, towards him, stopped, took out a penny, and held it out to the flower-girl.

For a moment a wan face was lifted to his, for a moment a pair of blue eyes met his own, then Mignon drew back, covering that miserable face with a corner of her cloak; and Adam, restoring the penny to his pocket, went on his way.

A pair of blue eyes. . . . Was he never to see a bit of blue sky, or a child's blonde head, without the eyes and hair of the woman he had once loved appearing before him?

He had rooted her out of his heart, yet he had not power to efface her image from his mind; a chance resemblance, would bring her back, and there would follow a period of unrest which he ascribed to his craving for vengeance on La Mert, to his disheartening and fruitless search; to anything but the real and true cause—his profound and ineradicable love for his wife.

What ailed him that day, Adam asked himself, as he turned into the precincts of the Temple, that he should be so thoroughly possessed by the thought of her; look which way he would, he saw nothing but her face, her eyes, while, mingling subtly with his thoughts, came the perfume of a cluster of violets?

He entered a house in one of the courts, and climbed the many stairs that led to his chambers.

His name did not appear among that long list of legal gentlemen below. He had no fear of being surprised by his father or any other person to whom was known the story of his disgrace, and here, in the intervals of his apparently useless search, he found among his books some portion of that forgetfulness which he had sternly sworn to himself to compass.

And yet, as he seated himself in his accustomed place, and drew towards him one of the volumes that he had been studying far into the preceding night, the letters on the page played strange tricks with his eyes, and spelt out over and over again the name of Mignon.

Those violets! Their scent seemed to pursue him everywhere, he could have sworn there were some in the room; and then he became aware of a current of air that streamed through the gradually-opening door, and in the widening aperture he saw—a great bunch of the flowers of which he was thinking.

Next, a shabby, slight figure emerged into view; he recognised it for that of the flower-girl, who had first offered him her wares, then refused his penny, and he said to himself that she had repented of that refusal, and followed him all the way for the coin, even up those many stairs that might well have deterred her.

He wished that she had not come . . . it was the sight of her that had put Mignon into his thoughts . . . he would give her, not a penny, but a shilling, and then she would go away gladly enough, and leave him to his work. But she should leave no violets with him, since they suggested Mignon to him.

He held the money out towards her, saying:

"I do not want your flowers, my girl, but since you have come so far——"

He stopped abruptly as she advanced towards him indeed, but extended no hand to take the proffered coin.

Nearer she came, nearer yet, until she stood beside him, then, laying her hand upon his, flowers and all, she looked into his face.

May not that be described as a moment of madness in which a man's mind fails to grasp, to comprehend, some simple fact that lies before him? To Adam the face into which he looked was the face of a stranger, a stranger who yet bore a likeness to the woman that he had loved, a faded, pale, and caricatured likeness, that was all; for were she placed by the side of the real Mignon, there would probably be little or no real resemblance between them.

He looked down at the hand lying upon his own; it was a slender hand, apparently unused to hard work, by no means such a hand as one would expect to belong to a poor flower-girl who toiled for her bread honestly.

"Douglas . . ." it was his name . . . the name by which no one save his mother had ever addressed him . . . and the voice was . . . Mignon's . . . eyes and voice alike were hers, yet this was not . . . Mignon . . .

He shivered, drew his hand away from beneath hers, then once again he held out the coin, not looking at the girl, but straight before him.

"You should not have followed me here," he said harshly;

"take this, and go!" and he pointed imperatively to the door.

That harsh voice, that peremptory gesture of dismissal, conveyed their meaning with cruel clearness to the poor creature's brain; for a moment she seemed about to obey him; then she flung herself on her knees beside him.

"Douglas . . ." she said in a voice of heart-breaking agony. "Douglas . . ." and it was strange that the name by which she had learned to love him should never pass her lips until reason had abandoned its guard over them, "I am your Mignon . . . your poor little Mignon . . ."

He sat as though turned to stone, and looked at her.

Even then he refused to realise the truth, but gazed at her as a man may at a mask behind which he seeks to pierce to the familiar features that he is told are behind it.

Nevertheless, that consciousness within us that argues not, but simply is, told him the truth.

He would not realise it, he thrust it from him, as, rising, and still keeping to that decision arrived at by him, he said:

"Do you hear me? Go!"

She lifted both hands, wildly pressing them against her brows, and as she did so, her miserable hat fell upon her shoulders, exposing the little blonde head that he knew so well.

Probably he believed that it was then only that he recognised her; yet I think the first shock of revelation was over, when, drawing back a step, he said:

"And what do you do—here?"

Comprehending no more of his words than that they were pitiless, she sought not to reply, only, with lips parted in what might well be mistaken for the quiver and agony of guilt, she awaited his next utterance.

Not as the Mignon of his manhood's dream did he behold her; and once again he experienced that burning intolerable shame which had beset him during that night's vigil at Rosemary.

It had been his one great fear that she would seek him out, perchance with some wild prayer for forgiveness, perchance because, when deprived of the love for which she had lost all, she would (as women, and not the best, have been known to do) yearn for that which she had formerly slighted.

Well, he had feared truly; she had found him out, and if the one word uttered by her meant anything, it meant that she had yet some hope, some desire, of reinstating herself in his heart.

That she had fallen to penury he could not doubt, although why this should be was hard to tell, unless it were that she had been deserted by Philip, and then, with a sharp, sudden pang, he remembered that she had offered him a bunch of violets . . . nay, that she was standing at a street-corner apparently selling them for a living . . . and was that strange look in her face that so perplexed him caused by—privation?

"Why do you not go back to Rosemary?" he said in measured tones; "it is a shelter that has long awaited you, *and Prue* still watches for, and awaits your coming——"

She gathered none of the sense of his words, only looked up into that face, stern and inexorable as fate, then, like a loving chidden child who evades mention of the fault for which it has but now been punished, yet seeks to make its peace by submission and a caress, she lifted both hands pleadingly towards him, and said, "Violets! sweet violets!

"All a-blowing
And a-growing!"

Then she smiled, the piteous, pathetic, vacant smile of the mad . . . and Adam, with a sudden, awful conviction of the truth, for the first time understood why her face had seemed to him as the face of a stranger.

CHAPTER XV.

"Nothing in his life
Became him like the leaving of it."

ADAM stood transfixed. All the loathing detestation of her sin, all the sickening at his own shame that her presence had hitherto induced in him, swept away in a great torrent of love and pity. Those pleading, outstretched hands . . . that lost, pathetic smile, that pitiful attitude, which in its confiding helplessness appealed to his manliness and strength, drove from him the consciousness of her fault, leaving him for the moment alive only to the awful punishment and consequences of it. What dread tale, that she had not power to speak, was locked within those trembling lips? What experience of cruelty and desertion had driven her out, all

astray, defenceless, at the mercy of man as she was, to support herself by selling violets in the open streets of London?

A knot rose in his throat . . . his eyes were dim as he stooped, and lifting that little kneeling figure, drew her into the chair whence he had but now risen.

He covered his face with his hands . . . but though his eyes were veiled, he saw her as the poor mindless, broken thing that she was, and, with a dual consciousness, at the same moment beheld her as she had once been—a girl whose laugh was music, whose glance was a sunbeam, and to whom all bright and airy graces had been natural as the air she breathed. He drew his hand from before his eyes, and looked at the squalid dress, the faded, pinched face, and asked himself again, were they caused—O merciful God!—by want?

As one goaded to madness by an intolerable thought, he went away, returning almost instantly with food, which he set before her, for one dreadful moment scarcely daring to breathe as she half stretched her hand towards it, then shook her head and resumed her anxious watching of his face.

He was saying to himself that the girl was his wife . . . that she was the creature whom he had vowed to watch over, to protect and cherish, who bore his name, the name of which he was so silently yet deeply proud . . . and that such as she now was she had become through the villainy of Philip La Mert.

The next moment, so speedily had Prue found Philip,

after tracking Adam (and Mignon) to the Temple, the door opened, and for the second time that morning an unexpected visitor stood on the threshold. The man for vengeance upon whom Adam hungered, entering hurriedly, came face to face with him.

"Thank God!" he cried, a great light of joy spreading over his ashen face, "that she is here—that she is with you. Half my task now, and that the hardest half, is done!"

"Dog!" cried Adam, "and do we meet at last?"

But even as he spoke, the conviction came home to him that his enemy had escaped him. Out of his hands had been taken the punishment for which he thirsted;—before the tribunal, not of man, but of God, would Philip La Mert, before many hours were past, be standing to give account of his evil deeds.

His enemy had escaped him! The thought of Mignon even was blotted out in that awful sense of frustrated vengeance, as, his whole attitude breathing strength, justice, and sublime wrath, he towered above that other, who, wan, bowed, and grey, bore upon his forehead that death-sign which the most ignorant could not have failed to comprehend. Covering his face with his hands, Adam drew back . . . this . . . was the thing with which he had so prayed to measure his strength . . . this, that had less than a woman's strength in its fevered, broken frame. . . .

Mignon was gazing from one to the other, painfully trying to understand . . . Without, a woman's form leaned against the lintel of the door, with fear and trembling awaiting the result of the meeting between the two men.

"Look at her," said Adam, lifting his hand and pointing to Mignon; "look at your handiwork, I say, and rejoice. 'But half your task was done,' you said; it would puzzle even you to work aught more deadly on yon broken, mindless thing than you have worked already!"

Philip's eyes turned towards the slight and sordid figure; he shuddered, yet not as one to whom the sight is a new one.

"Look well at her," cried Adam, in his terrible voice, the only outlet to the fury of baffled vengeance that swayed him; "you best know what she was ere you blighted her; look at her as she is, at a sight that were there justice in heaven, should strike you blind in the beholding!"

Still no reply, still that desperate struggle for breath, that hand pressed hard against the side, that mien of deep dejection.

"You swore to me," cried Adam, "as between man and man, that she should be sacred to you as your own sister might be, that never would you, by word or deed, bring discredit on her, or your love for her; and when my back was turned, you bided your opportunity, you stole her away, you made of her that which she now stands—a thing of shame, of sin, of degradation; and now, now you dare to pursue her even into my presence, a presence to which she has fled, with God knows what story of desertion and outrage, that she cannot speak. Go!" (there came into his voice the fury of a wild beast who springs upon his prey) "ere I forget my manhood and your weakness — go! nor dare

farther to molest yon poor outcast, who shall be cared for and tended as her helpless state demands. She is no longer yours."

"Mine?" said Philip, lifting his head at last. "She never was . . . as she has always been, so she is now—your own."

"Do you dare to mock me?" cried Adam, striding forward, the veins standing out on his forehead like cords. "What is it you dare to call mine?"

"Your wife," said Philip, his face bathed in the dews of exhaustion, "never has she for one moment swerved from her faith to you; nay, her very mind was in your keeping, and when she knew that your love had failed her, that you believed her to have betrayed you, that mind broke down, and she became what you see her now."

"You are mad!" said Adam, trembling violently, "mad, I say! Does a woman who loves her husband forsake him for another man? O! it is a fine tale, and one that does you credit, since you know that she is not able to speak and disprove it, and the lie that a man tells to shield the honour of a woman who has sinned for him is doubtless a noble one; nevertheless" (there came an ominous gleam into his eyes) "if you are wise, you will spare it me."

"She came away with me to her sister," said Philip, "to her sister who was dying—murdered by me. . . . Long ere she knew the name of Muriel's betrayer, in the days when she believed me to be Muriel's friend (and in this lay the whole secret of her apparent preference for me) she had wrung from me a promise that if ever I found Muriel, I

would go straight to her, whether it were by day or night, and bring her to that sister's side; and I kept my vow, at what cost to myself no one will ever know . . . ever know."

He paused, struggling with his mortal weakness, and in that pause Mignon timidly crept a step nearer to Adam and looked up into his face. But as one stricken with a sore and terrible shame her husband stood, and groaning aloud, hid his face from her.

She was innocent, after all! Phillis had been right, while he . . .

"Of the words of hatred and loathing that she spoke to me by her sister's corpse, when she knew me for what I was," went on Philip, "I will not speak . . . in my heart I bear them always, leaden curses to weigh my soul down to hell! only believe that under heaven there crawls no thing so vile in her eyes as I."

"But she loved you once," said Adam, "before she knew the story of her sister. . . . It was the knowledge of that which broke her love?"

"She never loved me," said Philip, "never . . . never . . . That was the last, the most miserable mistake of the fatal series; for, madman, coxcomb that I was, I once believed that her love was mine . . . that the heart which I saw day by day awakening for you was for me. . . . O! my God!" he cried, "how she undeceived me! . . . Do not dream that I have soiled her ears with one word that could pollute them; my vow to you I have kept to the letter, even in the teeth of my mistaken, miserable belief. . . . Pure as she was on the day you first beheld her, so

pure is she now, and her madness will not endure . . . with love's healing influence at work, it will pass . . . and you will be happy . . . happy . . ."

He had fallen rather than thrown himself into a chair, and now his head sank slowly, slowly forward, until it lay on his outstretched arms and rested there.

If only she would speak to him the one word of forgiveness for which he had so often prayed . . . if only he had strength to call to her . . . Surely, surely she would forgive him now?

"Mignon!"

Who uttered that rapt, delirious cry? Not Philip. . . . Looking up through the dimness of death, he saw those two standing face to face, saw the husband hold out arms to which the girl crept with a long, long, sobbing sigh, as one who finds herself at home after long wandering; then a great darkness came down on him, a great silence settled slowly about him . . . and Philip's soul had gone to meet his Maker.

THE END.

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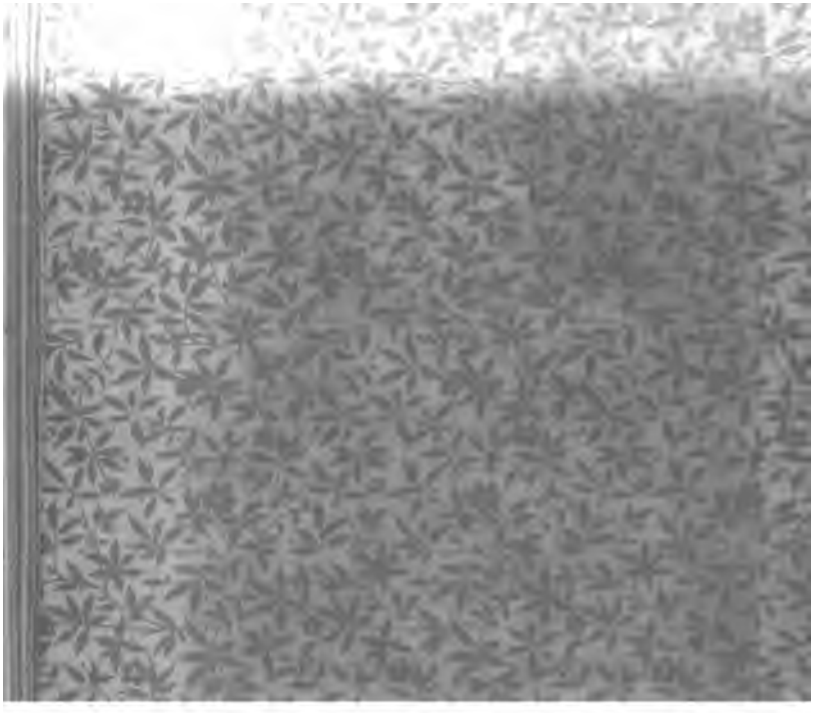

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